

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND ART

Horizon

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BY MAURICE BLANCHOT

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EDITH SITWELL
OUT OF SCHOOL

TO JOSÉ GARCIA VILLA

THE gold, the wild-beast fires begin again upon the fruit-boughs
Running from branch to branch, and our gold veins
Catch fire. In the caverns where our blood begins
Sound the ancestral voices

That are not fire but fate, blind impulse and predestination
Foretelling doom.
And the fleece of Marsyas, the last melting snow upon the branches
Trembles no more at the flute-sound.
O heart, it is spring!

And the wild-beast fires, the furred-lynx fruit-buds, the young
winds
And the young tendrils of those vines the gold spring rains
Fall from the branches.

And from the hoarse voice of the stream freed from the ice
The animal laughter's sound—
The neighings of the prophet horse arise
Who prophesied great evils once (and the spring thunders run
Along the ground
From his foretelling hoof); the bray
Of the world of asses following Darius—
The sound that scattered the great Scythian hordes;
The sound of the crowd's onolatry, and after
The Ritual Laughter at the escape from death:
For this is the age of the destroying Laughter.

In the forest there are great emerald mists from which the bird-
songs
Fall, the Cassandra voices. Through green lightnings and the
emeralds
Fallen from the trees
The young green sun of spring,

A laughing ghost, danced; with a ghostly voice
Calls to the children 'See! New worlds and emeralds and Fates
begin.

Soon will my greenness fade and I shall wear my own gold
armour,
Fighting the mists.'

And the children run from school
To the sound of the planetary system in the veins,
The beat of the young rains
And the thunder of the wild wood lilies' growth beneath the
ground.

They flee the old man who all morning long
Sifted a little dust through his dry hands
And boomed at the children 'Once this dust was Socrates,

The first spring sage, the satyr under the furred-lynx fruit-buds
Tearing the tendrils of the young spring rains
And, where the sap like peridots and beryls
Rise in the budding fig-branches, foretelling perils
Upon his flute that seemed like the young mist
Of spring, to the caverns where our blood begins.

Now is he but the emerald dust of lilies:
He is alone
With but the small equalities of dust.
And the green mist of spring will soon be gone, the Sun in his gold
armour
Shout through the budding branches. Ere it is too late
You must discriminate

Between true gold and false, between the Sun that is the ghost
Of your own heart, and the Sun the world has lost.
When to your Sun

Arise the breath of all the cultivated earth,
Gold mists from vines,
And all gold airs and prayers from cities, Man

Seeing his mirrored morning face, no more can find
The mask he wore through centuries
(Of faith and hope). The gold corrosive of the hypermodern suns
Of unbelief have shone upon them. They are gone

And only emptiness remains. This is the only good.
O fear that laughing ghost in his gold armour high in air
Who calls to you.'

But the children run from school
To learn their wisdom from the great gold fool
Who is to the world of sight
What truth is to the invisible—life-giver of all voices
In sap and bud, life-giver of mankind.

He sees through the rough Ape-dust the gold fires
Of the spirit spring like the wild-beast fires upon the branches;
The little and the great
The shadows of the crooked and the straight
Complete each other, and the cripple's hump,
The curve of the mountain hiding veins of gold
As equal in their grandeur! Sees the common lump
Of the world hold the seed of the flower the wisdom of the dark
Formed with an angel's innocence; the old
And wrinkled mask of *Pithecanthropus Erectus*
Hide the great brow of Socrates; the ass's ears
And the almond husk of the earth as no wise less
In grandeur than the long rivers and the almond husk
Of that great sleepy animal the world.

He sees the gold blood in the veins of plants and men
Have the beat of the gold planetary system; sees
The plant, a beast retarded by the dark,
(Whose root had once been gold, but changed by growth),
The beast, a plant that blossoms, freed by light,
Devoid of root like the planets, those bright bees
That move in heaven about their honeycombs of light,
And are forms of time that imitate the eternal—made
That from their unerring courses we might learn
From the intelligence in the wide heavens,

And the perturbed might learn from the unperturbed,
Set right the inharmonious errors of our lives,

And fear not change of Time and darkness, but behold
The elements are but as qualities
That change for ever like all things that have known generation,
like a gold
Image taking a new form forever, mutable
As the child who is innocence and oblivion, acceptance,
A new beginning, primal motion, a self-moving game that
changes
Like the heart of forgetful spring.

NOTES

Verse 13, lines 2, 3, 4. Adaptation of a passage in *Chance and Symbol*, Richard Hertz. Verse 15, lines 3, 4. *The Emperor Julian*. Verse 17, lines 3, 4, 5. Founded on a passage in Lorenz Oken's *Elements of Physiophilosophy*. Lines 8, 9, 10, 11, 12. Founded on a passage in Plato's *Timaeus Dialogue*. Verse 18, lines 2, 3, 4. Ibid. Lines 5, 6. *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Nietzsche.

PATRICK KAVANAGH

THE PADDIAD

OR THE DEVIL AS A PATRON OF
IRISH LETTERS

In the corner of a Dublin pub
This party opens—blub-a-blub—
Paddy Whiskey, Rum and Gin
Paddy Three sheets in the wind;
Paddy of the Celtic Mist,
Paddy Connemara West,
Chestertonian Paddy Frog
Croaking nightly in the bog.
All the Paddies having fun
Since Yeats handed in his gun,
Every man completely blind
To the truth about his mind.

In their middle sits a fellow
Aged about sixty, bland and mellow;
Saintly silvery locks of hair,
Quiet-voiced as monk at prayer;
Every Paddy's eye is glazed
On this fellow. Mouths amazed
Drink in all his words of praise.
O comic muse descend to see
The devil Mediocrity,
For that is the devil sitting there,
Actually Lucifer.

He has written many Catholic novels,
None of which mention devils:
Daring men, beautiful women,
Nothing about muck or midden,
Wholesome atmosphere—Why must
So-called artists deal with lust?

About the devil's dark intentions
There are some serious misconceptions:
The devil is supposed to be
A nasty man entirely,
Horned and hoofed and fearful gory—
That's his own invented story.

The truth in fact is the reverse
He does not know a single curse;
His forte's praise for what is dead,
Pegasus's Munnings bred.
Far and near he screws his eyes
In search of what will never rise,
Souls that are fusty, safe and dim,
These are the geniuses of the land to him.

Most generous-tempered of the gods
He listens to the vilest odes,
Aye, and not just idle praise!
For these the devil highly pays.
And the crowds for culture cheer and cheer:

'A modern Medici is here,
Never more can it be said
That Irish poets are not fed'
The boys go wild and toast the Joker
The master of the mediocre.

'A great renaissance's is under way'
You can hear the devil say
As into our pub comes a new arrival,
A man who looks the conventional devil:
This is Paddy Conscience, this
Is Stephen Dedalus,
This is Yeats who ranted to
Knave and fool before he knew,
This is Sean O'Casey saying,
Fare thee well to Inishfallen.

He stands on the perimeter of the crowd
Half drunk to show that he's not proud
But willing given half a chance
To play the game with any dunce;
He wears a beaten bedraggled pose
To put the devil at his ease,
But Lucifer sees through the pose
Of drunken talk and dirty clothes;
The casual word that drops by chance
Denotes a dangerous arrogance,
Still sober and alive enough
To blast this world with a puff.

Every Paddy sitting there
Pops up like a startled hare,
Loud ignorings fill each face—
This behaviour's a disgrace,
A savage intruding on our Monday's
Colloquy on trochees, spondees,
And whether Paddy Mist or Frog
Is the greatest singer of the bog.
Hypodermics sourpiss loaded
Are squirted at our foolish poet.

The devil sips his glass of plain
And takes up his theme again:

‘My suggestion is for a large bounty
For the best poet in each county.
How many poems, Mist, can you spare
For my new anthology of Clare?
Ten guineas per poem is fair,
But they must definitely be Clare;
Some lyrics in your recent volume
Were influenced by Roscommon’

Conscience: ‘I’m a Clareman more than Mist’
Mist: ‘But essentially a novelist’

Frog: ‘Essentially a man of prose
As any whole-time verseman knows.
I think that Paddy Connemara West
Is worth twenty guineas at least’

‘I agree, Frog
West is one of the great singers of the bog—
I’ll give him twenty guineas, so—’

‘Oh, oh, oh’

Conscience is going mad,
Tearing, raving, using bad
Language in the bar
Where the bards of Ireland are.
Now peace again, they’ve chucked him out.
Paddy Frog leaves down his stout,
Clenches his chubby grocer’s fist,
Says: ‘I disagree with Mist
That Paddy Connemara West
Is inferior to Stephens at his best—
A Catholic and Gaelic poet,
His last group of poems show it’

Devil: ‘Paddy Connemara gets my vote
As the expresser of the Catholic note.
His pious feeling for the body
And rejection of the shoddy

Mystical cloak that Conscience trails
Places him among the greatest of Gaels;
In my last radio talk I drew
Attention to this Froggish view.

We must bring out a Collected Edition
The money's a minor consideration—
What most we want to bring success
Is an end to petty bitterness,
No more slashing notices in the press
But something broadly generous.
We want an openness of heart—
No Olympian critic saying: depart
From me ye cursed pack of fools,
Only poetasters form schools.
You remember Paddy Conscience
“Count me out at mummers' rantings”

Here news has just come in that Paddy
Conscience lost his latest body,
Dead in Paris—
The devil sighs—‘Shocking news!
I much admired all his views.
A man of genius, generous, kind,
Not a destructive idea in his mind.
My dearest friend! Let's do him proud.
Our wives will make a green silk shroud
To weave him in. The Emerald Isle
Must bury him in tourist style.

A broadcast on his work might be
A reading of his poetry.
The Government will give a grant
To build a worthy monument,
I know the Minister involved,
The cost will readily be halved.
Before we part let's make a date
To meet tomorrow night at eight
To make the final funeral plans,
For this will be Ireland seen by France.

This is the window of our shop.
Paddy Mist might do an ap-
Preciation on the general
Culture of an Irish funeral'

All the Paddies rise and hurry
Home to write the inside story
Of their friendship for the late
Genius who was surely great;
Recall his technical innovations,
His domestic life, his patience
With the humblest aspirant
On the literary bent.

All his hunger was imagined,
Never was a falser legend,
He could make whenever he chose
A fortune out of verse or prose.
Irish women spirituelle
Ran from race-tracks at his spell,
Left the beds of jockeys, actors—
These may be considered factors.

The group's dispersed. The devil stays,
Some discontent in his face.
Already he can see another
Conscience coming on to bother
Ireland with muck and anger,
Ready again to die of hunger,
Condemnatory and uncivil—
What a future for a devil!

W. H. AUDEN

THE IRONIC HERO

SOME REFLECTIONS ON DON QUIXOTE

THE following remarks have to assume that the reaction of other readers to *Don Quixote* is the same as mine, namely, that it is a portrait of the Christian Saint. Granted this, it may be interesting to consider:

1. What are the artistic difficulties involved in attempting such a portrait?
2. How does Cervantes solve them?

★ ★ ★

THE HERO

To be the hero or heroine of a book a person must be:

1. Interesting, i.e., either his character or the situation in which he finds himself must be exceptional, even unique.
2. Completely public, i.e., his character, his motives, his actions must become completely manifest to the reader even if they remain hidden from the hero himself, deducible even if not directly stated. This means that anything which happens or might happen to the hero which is not described is of no account.

★ ★ ★

Heroes are conventionally divided into three classes, the epic hero, the tragic hero, and the comic hero. Don Quixote fits none of them.

★ ★ ★

THE EPIC HERO

The epic hero is born with the gift of exceptional *arête*. By birth and breeding he is exceptionally strong, brave, handsome, etc. This *arête* is manifested in exceptional deeds, i.e., he performs feats of which the average is incapable. His motive is to win admiration from his equals whether they be friends or foes. The moral standard by which he lives is not a universal requirement, the law, but an individual one, honour. He is not tragic, i.e., he does not suffer more than others; but his death has exceptional pathos—the great

warrior comes to the same end as the lowest churl. He exists in the present moment when he comes into collision with another heroic individual.

THE TRAGIC HERO

All tragic heroes must (a) have some demonstrated *arête* in the epic sense, (b) move from glory to misery; their tragic character is manifested by their suffering more than the average. (c) This suffering is caused by a collision with the universal law of justice, which is the same for all. With this in common, there are, however, important differences between the classical and the Christian conceptions of the tragic hero, e.g. :

1. The former is placed in a situation where he is bound to become guilty of manifest sins. The sin for which he is responsible is the subjective sin of hybris. He is made to commit the others as a punishment. The situation of the latter is created partly by others, partly by himself. He is as responsible for the manifest sins he commits as he is for the invisible sin of pride which produces them. Further, there is a difference between hybris and pride. Hybris means believing that you are a god, i.e., that you cannot suffer; pride means a defiant attempt to become a god, when you secretly know that you are a mortal creature. The classical tragic hero is blind; the Christian tragic hero deceives himself.
2. The former, therefore, must be a fortunate and happy man. The latter (e.g. Richard III) need not be; he must only have an exceptionally strong defiant will.
3. The effect of suffering on the former is to make him humble; through suffering he expiates the past. The effect of suffering on the latter is to harden his heart; for, if he repents, then he ceases to be tragic: e.g. Angelo in *Measure for Measure* and Lear are not tragic heroes. Othello is. The Christian tragic hero is damned.

THE COMIC HERO

In the comedy of situation (e.g. identical twins) the hero is not properly so called, for he is the average man placed in a less dignified situation than the average. The truly comic hero has less *arête* than the average, e.g., the jealous old husband or the unsuccessful rogue. His attempt to violate the law is thwarted not by the law but by other rogues who are equally outside the law.

Like the tragic hero he suffers; but (a) the spectator does not suffer sympathetically because he does not identify himself with the comic hero through admiration, (b) the suffering is temporary, (c) the suffering is educational, i.e., it cures him of his comic madness so that he conforms with the law, either through repentance or out of prudence.

THE CHRISTIAN SAINT

The Christian Saint has no special *arête* of power or knowledge (such as he may have is irrelevant), only an obedient will. He is virtuous out of faith in and love of God and his neighbour, not out of a pride which wants him to think well of himself.

To manifest this aesthetically is very difficult because:

- (a) He must be shown as failing in a worldly sense, i.e., as coming into collision with the law of this world, otherwise there is no proof that he acts out of faith and not mere worldly prudence.
- (b) Failure and suffering, however, are in themselves no proof of faith, because the collision with the law may also be the result of pride. The visible ends of Christ, the repentant thief and the unrepentant thief are the same, though the third is a tragic figure, the second one a comic figure in the profoundest sense, and Christ is not a hero at all, for he is not the Man-God (Hercules) but the God-Man.
- (c) The virtues produced by pride cannot be distinguished objectively from the virtues produced by faith. When Becket in *Murder in the Cathedral* is assailed by the fourth tempter, who suggests that he be martyred for self-glorification, it is impossible for Eliot to prove to us that Becket resists the temptation; he can only state that it exists.
- (d) It is possible, up to a point, to manifest hybris; Agamemnon walks on the purple carpet, Darius attempts to bridge the Hellespont, etc. Pride cannot be directly manifested, for it cannot be directly known even by its victims. I can look in the mirror of my conscience and learn that I am greedy, envious, lustful, etc., and from that infer that I am proud. I cannot, however, learn that I am proud because the pride, if it is there, is in my eye which is looking into the mirror. As Nietzsche says, 'He who despises himself nevertheless esteems himself as a despiser'.

★ ★ ★

For the tragic hero suffering is real and destructive; for the comic hero it is unreal or temporary or curative; for both it is a sign that they are not in the truth: both suffer with misunderstanding. The saint, on the other hand, is ironically related to suffering; it is real, nevertheless he understands that it is a blessing, a sign that he is in the truth. 'I say pain but ought to say solace.'



THE KNIGHT ERRANT

The Knight Errant, whom Don Quixote wishes to become and actually parodies, was an attempt to christianize the pagan epic hero, i.e., the Knight Errant,

- (a) possesses epic *arête* of good birth, good looks, strength, etc.
- (b) This *arête* is put in the service of the law, to rescue the unfortunate, protect the innocent, and combat the wicked.
- (c) His motives are three:
 - (i) the desire for glory.
 - (ii) the love of justice.
 - (iii) the love of an individual woman who judges and rewards.
- (d) He suffers exceptionally, first in his adventures and collisions with the lawless, secondly in his temptations to lawlessness in the form of unchastity and, thirdly, in his exceptionally difficult erotic romance.
- (e) In the end he succeeds in this world. Vice is punished, and virtue is rewarded by the lady of his heart.



When we first meet Don Quixote he is (a) poor, (b) not a knight, (c) fifty, (d) has nothing to do except hunt and read romances about Knight-Errantry. Manifestly, he is the opposite of the heroes he admires, i.e., he is lacking in the epic *arête* of birth, looks, strength, etc. His situation, in fact, is aesthetically uninteresting except in one thing: his passion is great enough to make him sell land to buy books. This makes him aesthetically comic. Religiously he is tragic; for he is a hearer, not a doer of the word, the weak man guilty in his imagination of Promethean pride. Now suddenly he goes mad, i.e., he sets out to become what he admires. Aesthetically this looks like pride; in fact, religiously, it is a conversion, an act of faith, a taking up of his cross.

THE QUIXOTIC MADNESS AND THE TRAGIC MADNESS

The tragic hero is tempted by an *arête* he possesses to conquer this world, whose nature he knows. His decisions are the result of a calculation of the probabilities of success, and each success increases his madness (e.g., Iago). Don Quixote is (a) lacking in *arête*, (b) has a fantastic conception of this world, (c) always meets with failure yet is never discouraged, (d) suffers himself intentionally and makes others suffer only unintentionally.

THE QUIXOTIC MADNESS AND THE COMIC MADNESS

The comic rogue declares: The World=that which exists to give me money, beauty, etc. I refuse to suffer by being thwarted. He is cured by being forced to suffer through collision with the real world.

Don Quixote declares: The World=that which needs my existence to save it at whatever cost to myself. He comes into collision with the real world but insists upon continuing to suffer. He becomes the Knight of the Doleful Countenance but never despairs.

DON QUIXOTE AND HAMLET

Hamlet lacks faith in God and in himself. Consequently he must define his existence in terms of others, e.g., I am the man whose mother married his uncle, who murdered his father. He would like to become what the Greek tragic hero is, a creature of situation. Hence his inability to act, for he can only 'act', i.e., play at possibilities.

Don Quixote is the antithesis of an actor, being completely incapable of seeing himself in a role. Defining his situation in terms of his own character, he is completely unreflective.

MADNESS AND FAITH

To have faith in something or someone means:

- (a) that the latter is not manifest. If it becomes manifest, then faith is no longer required.
- (b) The relation of faith between subject and object is unique in every case. Hundreds may believe, but each has to believe by himself.

Don Quixote exemplifies both. (a) He never sees things that aren't there (delusion) but sees them differently, e.g., windmills

as giants, sheep as armies, puppets as Moors, etc. (b) He is the only individual who sees them thus.

FAITH AND IDOLATRY

The idolater makes things out to be stronger than they really are so that they shall be responsible for him, e.g., he might worship a windmill for its giant-like strength. Don Quixote never expects things to look after him; on the contrary he is always making himself responsible for things and people who have no need of him and regard him as an impertinent old meddler.

FAITH AND DESPAIR

People are tempted to lose faith (a) when it fails to bring worldly success, (b) when the evidence of their senses and feelings seem against it. Don Quixote (a) is constantly defeated yet persists, (b) between his fits of madness sees that the windmills are not giants but windmills, etc., yet, instead of despairing, says, 'Those cursed magicians delude me, first drawing me into dangerous adventures by the appearances of things as they really are and then presently changing the face of things as they please'. His supreme test comes when Sancho Panza describes a country wench, whom Don Quixote sees correctly as such, as the beautiful Princess Dulcinea and in spite of his feelings concludes that he is enchanted and that Sancho Panza is right.

DON QUIXOTE AND THE KNIGHT ERRANT

Don Quixote's friends attack the Romances he loves on the grounds that they are historically untrue, and lacking in style.

Don Quixote, on the other hand, without knowing it, by his very failure to imitate his heroes exactly, at once reveals that the Knight Errant of the Romances is half-pagan, and becomes himself the true Christian Knight.

EPIC DUALISM

The world of the Romances is a dualistic world where the completely good and innocent fight the completely evil and guilty. The Knight Errant comes into collision only with those who are outside the law, giants, heretics, heathens, etc. Don Quixote when in one of his spells, under the illusion that he is showing the

righteous anger of the Knight Errant, comes into collision with the law, i.e. he attacks innocent clerics and destroys other people's property.

When he is not deluded as to the nature of those he is trying to help, e.g., the convicts or the boy being thrashed, he only succeeds in making things worse and earns enmity, not gratitude.

FRAUENDIENST

Don Quixote affirms all the articles of the Amor religion, namely, that (a) the girl must be noble and beautiful, (b) there must be some barrier, (c) the final goal of the Knight's trials is to be rewarded by having his love reciprocated.

In fact, the girl he calls Dulcinea del Toboso is 'a good likely country lass for whom he had formerly had a sort of inclination, though 'tis believed she never heard of it'. She is of lower social status, and he is past the age when sexual love means anything to him. Nevertheless, his behaviour has all the courage that might be inspired by a great passion.

Again, Don Quixote expects to be tempted to unchastity so that, in the inn when the hunchback maid is trying to reach the carter's bed, he fancies that she is the daughter of the Governor of the Castle, who has fallen in love with him and is trying to seduce him. Bruised and battered as he is, even Don Quixote has to admit that for the moment he has no capacity.

The language is the language of Eros, the romantic idolization of the fair woman, but its real meaning is the Christian agape, which loves all equally irrespective of their merit.

SNOBBERY

The true Knight Errant has nothing to do with the Lower Orders and must never put himself in an undignified position, e.g., Launcelot is disgraced by riding in a cart. Don Quixote attempts to do likewise but with singular unsuccess. He is constantly having to do with the Lower Orders under the illusion that they are the nobility. His aristocratic refusal to pay, which he adopts out of literary precedence, not personal feeling, never works out—he ends by overpaying. Again the language is the language of the feudal knight, but the behaviour is that of the Suffering Servant. This may be compared with the reverse situation in *Moby Dick*, when Captain Ahab leaves his cabin boy in his captain's cabin and

mounts the look-out like an ordinary seaman: here the behaviour is apparently humble, but in fact the extremity of pride.

THIS-WORLDLINESS

The Knight Errant is this-worldly in that he succeeds in arms and in love. Don Quixote professes a similar hope but in fact is not only persistently defeated but also cannot in the end even maintain in combat that Dulcinea is without a rival. Thus, he not only has to suffer the Knight's trials but also must suffer the consciousness of defeat. He is never able to think well of himself. He uses the language of the epic hero, but reveals himself to us as the Knight of Faith, whose kingdom is not of this world.

SANCHO PANZA AND DON QUIXOTE

Without his comic lymphatic squire, the Knight of the Doleful Countenance would be incomplete. Sancho Panza's official motive for following Don Quixote is the promise of a governorship. But this is a purely imaginary idea to the former, and in the end he reveals his motives, which are (a) for the excitement, (b) for love of his master. Sancho Panza sees the world that requires changing as it is, but has no wish himself to change it. Yet it turns out that he is the one who has to play the part of the Knight Errant and rescue his distressed master from misfortune. Don Quixote wishes to change the world but has no idea what the world is like. He fails to change anything except Sancho Panza's character. So the two are eternally related. Don Quixote needs Sancho Panza as the one creature about whom he has no illusions but loves as he is; Sancho Panza needs Don Quixote as the one constant loyalty in his life which is independent of feeling. Take away Don Quixote, and Sancho Panza is so nearly pure flesh, immediacy of feeling, so nearly without will that he becomes a hedonist pagan who rejects everything but matter. Take away Sancho Panza, on the other hand, and Don Quixote is so nearly pure spirit that he becomes a Manichee who rejects matter and feeling and is nothing but an egotistic will.

DON QUIXOTE'S DEATH

However many further adventures one may care to invent for Don Quixote—and, as in all cases of a true myth, they are potentially infinite—the conclusion can only be the one which Cervantes gives, namely, that he recovers his senses and dies.

Despite the protestations of his friends, who want him to go on providing them with amusement, he must say: 'Ne'er look for birds of this year in the nests of the last: I was mad, but I am now in my senses: I was once Don Quixote de la Mancha, but am now the plain Alonso Quixano, and I hope the sincerity of my words and my repentance may restore me the same esteem you have had for me before.'

For, in the last analysis, the saint cannot be presented aesthetically. The ironic vision gives us a Don Quixote, who is innocent of every sin but one; and that one sin he can put off only by ceasing to exist as a character in a book, for all such characters are condemned to it, namely, the sin of being at all times and under all circumstances interesting.

Analogy is not identity.

Art is not enough.

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MAURICE BLANCHOT
ADOLPHE, OR THE
MISFORTUNES OF
SINCERITY

ADOLPHE always counts a great deal in our conception of the French novel. How much does this idea of a romantic tradition act even on those writers who are the furthest removed from it? And what does this tradition represent? The small number of opinions which go to make it, those rules which we draw from it? Is it not in the first place, the feeling of a mysterious reality symbolized by the power which some works have of lasting, of stubbornly inhabiting the background of our literary experience and our language? When a literature becomes classical, it is this temptation to outlive time which its influence brings to bear on all those who feel impelled to follow it. In some ways this is perhaps an advantage, but it is also a dangerous temptation, the lure of the timeless; the hope of existing outside history, of acting and being admirable independently of the historical

conditions of success. It is the thought that literature offers us the chance of an abode in the platonic sky and imposes on us the duty of attaining the purity of its essences which are eternal. And from this come all kinds of constraints, pretensions and tricks. Whatever one thinks of the idea of *engagement* it has at least the merit of being applicable only to the brief duration of our life, it does not ask us to accept this vague and hypocritical commitment without limit, for all time, and even outside time which is the petty hell of artistic immortality.

From the moment we start to ask by what characteristics a work of art which lasts, succeeds in lasting, we fall into the trap of classical influence. Now, the answer changes with the times. At one moment *Adolphe* triumphs by its purity, its simplicity, 'an undated work' say some, a book 'without a country' say others. At moments it is liked because it represents the passions of its period with an art which is not; the nineteenth-century hero uses the language of the eighteenth century, the modern hero is presented in a form which avoids all trappings of fashion. Or else, this short novel is admired for its analytical spirit, this violent, dry and impersonal lucidity which seems to be one of the constant traits of our tradition, and which keeps alive everything which springs from it. But later on we come to like *Adolphe* because it has something unique and even suspect, because far from being the result of pure art, it expresses the particular experience and something like the madness of a man who is difficult to understand, and in many ways one of the strangest we know. And it is then that we see that this romantic tradition, whose principal characteristic seemed to be the search for universal values, is essentially manifested by works where the author looks at nothing but himself, expresses nothing but his personal secret and includes all that is most surprising and shocking: *La Princesse de Cleves*, *Manon Lescaut*, *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, *Justine*, *René*, *Adolphe*, *La Chartreuse de Parme*, *Aurelia*, *Maldoror*—all of them unique works because what they express is easily included in the inheritance, but as something which is not inherited, and so which remains intact and can be transmitted without loss.

It is from this double appearance of being a work which applies to all times and to all people, and nevertheless applies to only one person and is entirely enclosed in itself, that *Adolphe*, like all

classical art, draws its ability to survive; but here the contradiction is particularly strong, and all its simplicity, rigour and purity only make what we read the more unusual. Obviously Adolphe's state of mind can be reduced to simple formulas: 'Adolphe or the inability to love,' said Jean Mistler; 'Adolphe or the greatness of severity towards oneself,' said Charles du Bos—and many others; we have been told of the indecision, the weakness, the love of remorse, the cruelty of Adolphe. We note that these epithets contradict each other. According to Delecluze, and M. Martineau who quotes him, Stendhal complained in turn of the affectation of the book and admired the extreme truthfulness of its feelings: he considered that it expressed well what it had to express, but that it was really about a kind of tragic 'Marivaudage'; affectation and truth, tragedy and trickery, perfect language, yet only language—the uncertainty of Beyle about Adolphe is no greater than that of Adolphe about himself. It is too true that the stylization of this character, the stripping of the anecdote to the bone, the ordinary nature of the passion which it illustrates go hand in hand with a quality which one never succeeds in understanding and which is the secret of the work. It is the same mystery, the same strange necessity which Constant discovers in himself, which he notices and which he explores with lucidity without ever being able either to bear or to reject it.

Charles du Bos, in the lectures which have just been published, tried to be no less just towards Constant than Constant would have wished to be towards everyone, and towards whom his friends have been so unjust. His extreme intelligence has been recognized but he is reproached with the mediocre use he made of it. He is accused of being weak because, starting several love affairs he showed himself incapable of ending any of them, cruel because he suffered in chains which he could not break, insensitive because cold and no more interested in himself than in other people, and finally inconstant (*sola inconstantia constans*, he said) because he never attached himself except to try and break away. And on top of all that, cowardly enough to heap coals of fire on Napoleon when the Empire was tumbling and rally to his cause during the Hundred Days, and servile enough to ask from the Authorities for the material advantages which cost him his independence. These are, approximately, the judgements of Sainte Beuve who felt too near Constant to understand him and too

inferior not to envy and condemn him. It was in revolt against these injustices that Charles du Bos, by an analysis, in which he shows a delicacy of mind in a patient examination of texts, undertook a work of reparation from which Benjamin Constant emerges as the hero of lucidity and a martyr to pity.

Charles du Bos's conclusions are seldom contestable. Constant's lucidity is extreme; lively, strong, without hesitation as without vanity, great enough to understand without destroying the mysterious moments which it meets. It is traditional to make Adolphe and his creator into the victims of an excess of analysis. He himself reproached himself with it: 'I hate this fatuousness of a mind which believes that it forgives what it explains; I hate this vanity which is absorbed in itself while recounting the harm it has done, which has the pretentiousness to make itself an object of pity while describing itself, roaming indestructible in the midst of ruins, analysing instead of repenting'. But this mind, in appearance so guilty of complicity with itself, in leaving us an *Intimate Journal*, has left us the most unfailing, and the least complacent of documents, and one completely foreign to the spirit of analysis. For the most part it consists of brief notes where he tries neither to revive something lived nor to take his revenge on something he did not know how to live, nor to say 'I alone', nor to *mettre son cœur à nu*, nor to give in to the temptation or the excuse of an impossible sincerity. With the result that in this rare effect he is more natural than Stendhal because he cares less for naturalness, and he is even more simple because he doesn't aim at simplicity: 'To occupy my evening I am re-reading my Journal; it quite amused me . . . When I began it I promised myself to speak only for myself, and yet such is the influence of the habit of speaking to the gallery that sometimes I forgot.'

This demon of analysis who writes a Journal where analysis is almost absent is also a mind enclosed in itself and yet completely capable of making a just estimation of others. Twenty-four hours after meeting Madame de Staël he judges her with this truthfulness: 'I think that her activity is a need, as much as, and more than, a merit: but she uses it to do good . . . What you say of her ridiculous side is true, she quotes the great like yesterday's *parvenu* . . . but I don't think she considers herself clever; she feels that she has a lot, she has a great need of talk, of giving herself, of admitting neither prudence nor restraint . . . she overpraises

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people because she wants to please them. When they are no longer there, she naturally retraces her steps; one can't call that absolute perfidy . . . ' Later on, he will speak less honestly of her: she will be a 'torrent', 'the shaking of the universe and the movement of chaos', 'the eruption of a volcano', 'the most egotistical, the most frenzied, the most ungrateful, the most vain and the most vindictive of women'. But that is what she was to be from then on with him, that is what his own folly was to force her to become, until he will write at the height of a stormy session: 'Appalling scene, horrible, insensate; terrible words. Either she is mad or I am.'

We can see that Constant's lucidity is not that of an indifferent person. It is a neutrality that passion over-excites. At the moment when his feelings for Madame Récamier overwhelmed and completely blinded him, he wrote of her: 'She is sunk in the trivial *coquetterie* which is her calling and is alternately pleased and sorry for herself over the pain she causes to three or four suitors of whom I am one: she does a little good when it causes her no trouble and sets above everything the Mass, and the sighs which she thinks come from her soul, and which only come from her boredom'. Which does not prevent him from writing on the same day, 'Juliette must love me . . . or I must kill myself. I swear to give 12,000 francs to the poor if she loves me. The death I have chosen is not painful; fatigue lowers physical and moral suffering: there must be no looking back.' These texts are enough to dispel the legend of the insensitive Constant. What we shall see is that he was only sensitive along certain lines. But he himself while remarking on his reserve, his coldness, his weak curiosity, never ceases to repudiate this suspicion of insensibility. 'I prefer the folly of enthusiasm,' he wrote to his aunt. And, in his Journal, 'People reproach me for my lack of sensibility. No, I am not deficient in sensibility: but mine is susceptible and that of others never quite fits in with it . . . In theirs I see nothing but a means of getting rid of pain which strikes me as ignoble. In a word, my sensibility is always wounded by the demonstration of that of others.' And even more than these abstract judgements, the remarks in his Journal on the events which touch him show, in what he feels and suffers, a violence pushed to madness. On Madame Récamier: 'An appalling and crazy day . . . terrible awakening—a frenzied night and morning. I cry without

stopping,' etc. On the death of his father: 'My father is dead! My head is troubled and my blood is ice.' On his own life: 'No one is in doubt as to the kind of folly which floods and devastates it!' and again (this time in a letter): 'I am a stricken creature . . .'

Constant's drama is banal in appearance and, what is more, it is really banal. But what makes it unique is that at the same time as he undergoes it, he gives us the key to its understanding, and discloses its real meaning and its real scope. His passions are of the strongest. When Madame de Staël keeps their relationship on the level of flirtation he takes poison and we find him dying: but she finally gives in, and then she ceases 'to be an aim, and becomes a tie'. Then no more love: attachment, doubtless, but an attachment felt above all through the boredom of feeling himself attached. The enjoyment of what he has won makes him regret the liberty he has lost, and as Madame de Staël is passionately addicted to commitment, as she will not allow people to free themselves of her, as she exacts a constant and devoted attendance which is, moreover, not exclusive of others, she rapidly transforms this tie into an overwhelming burden which prevents him from living his own life and turns him into a madman. Well, why does he not break this tie? But here we have the other movement in the drama; he cannot break away and he is prevented from doing so not by weakness or irresolution, but because he cannot bear the suffering he would cause. The sight and even the feeling of suffering represent a torment and an enigma which convulse him. He cannot see clearly on the subject and makes it into a fatality of the human condition. 'The great question in life is the suffering one causes . . . ' 'The only thing I respect on earth is suffering, and I want to die without having to reproach myself for having disdained it.' He sees in this a trait of his nature: 'I know of no one but me who is always led into feeling more for others than for himself, because pity pursues me'. It is this feeling of being carried away which upsets his existence. When he no longer feels passion, he has a passion for breaking away. But if he wants to break away, he pains her whom he is leaving, and he cannot contain this suffering. 'She uttered terrible cries of suffering and desolation. A heart of iron could not have resisted them.' And about his wife, whom he does not love, who betrays and makes fun of him: 'The idea of what she suffers and will suffer . . . poisons the feeling of my freedom'. If he resigns himself to remaining he must pretend

to feelings he no longer has, because the lack of feeling is as painful for others as a rupture would be. And if he dissimulates, this dissimulation finishes by smothering him, to the point where he breaks away, putting all his energies into getting free, causing a thousand agonies, causing so many that he can no longer bear it; then again he dissimulates until the time for the next and equally hopeless bid for freedom, to be followed by the next term of misery for himself and his next relapse into bondage.

Constant is a striking example of the paradox which lies at the root of all human relationships, when these take for their objective the very lack which constitutes them. He often longs for solitude, but as we shall see and for the reasons we shall see, solitude itself holds as many tortures as does company. He cannot do without other people, his whole life proves it: he marries twice, has love affairs more weighty than twenty marriages, lives in the world and off the world in which, moreover, he is brilliantly witty. But he cannot stand other people from the moment that he conceives of existence not as something which escapes him, but as something which binds him. The principle behind all these impulses is the feeling of the distance which separates him from other people. He knows and he feels that this distance is at the same time the condition and the objective in his relationship with others. He must move away from them if he wants to come close to them, and he cannot communicate with them unless he becomes master of the intervening gulf. So it is not Madame de Staël whom he wishes to attain and win, but the very distance which separates her from him; that absence which in the most real sense is the only way in which men can make themselves really present.

A dozen texts prove this. This gulf is often invisible to him except when he is bored, and then he lives in apathy and laziness, confronted with his own emptiness. But if another human being transforms this gulf, digs it deeper, makes of it something burning, luminous and unbridgeable, if the obstacles are multiplied, if the gulf appears ever larger and more profound, then Constant's desire awakens, grows, is provoked, becomes madness, he longs for death and ceaselessly tries to attain that other person whose possession will exhaust his desire, without even having given him that which aroused it: that irreducible distance between human beings which explains, as he notes, that the other is never oneself. So it is not because he has too much that his desire ceases, for he

can never have too much. What he wants, what any of these beautiful creatures reveal to him, is not only the distance between him and them, but that distance which is the basis of all human relationships, and which he tries to live and to make his own. Thus, loving Madame Récamier, and loving her even more because she is unattainable, he begins to suffer from everything else which he lacks and even from the coldness of his wife to whom he is nevertheless so indifferent. ('Without this maddening need to love which Juliette has given me, I would be all right.')

'Contradictions make me mad.' 'My heart is wearied by everything it has and regrets everything it has not.' 'If Juliette did love me I would be tired of her.' 'I only love from a distance, from gratitude or pity.' And now comes the moment when, less from lassitude than from a desire to restore the possibility of human relationships for himself, he tries to break away, to substitute a real absence for the presence which stifles him. And then begin the uncertainties and ambiguities of the break and the contradiction by which, each time he tries to go, he is forced to inflict pain and so make his escape impossible. We cannot say that he enjoyed this suffering; he suffered, but he only felt it through others and in others, in the lack which they made him feel and which thus made them present in a more troubling way. He has told us that his personal sufferings are little to him, but the sufferings of others weigh intolerably. He has said, 'My affection for her increased through the pain which I caused her'. The suffering of another person puts him in a state of inexpressible agitation. When Madame de Staël loses her father to whom she was devoted, the thought that he is going to see her in this state fills him with feelings of an extraordinary violence: 'There is something in my situation which is like waiting for an execution whose hour has been fixed'. Even the sufferings of the apparently indifferent have a fascinating power over his imagination. He speaks of a young girl of twenty-three hanged in England for forgery. Caught red-handed, dragged to the court, she did nothing to defend herself, she passed from one fainting fit to another. Condemned and taken back to prison she remained immobile in one place without eating or drinking. The day of the execution she allowed herself to be led off without any resistance and without appearing to understand what was going on around her. At the last moment, when

she felt the boards give way under her feet, at that very last moment, she uttered a loud cry and finally gave her first and last sign of life. Hearing of this suffering so solitary and despised, so unnoticed by others, Constant's 'blood runs cold'. And it is not only the depth of this misery which moves him; he is also moved by the picture of this young girl whose suffering is silence, whose life is spent in passing from one faint to another: she is for him the incarnation of that absence in which he attains anew to the existence of others, and which he makes the scene of his desires and the object of his impossible dream.

'For more than a year, I longed for complete independence. I have it and I am frightened. It is as if I were overwhelmed by the solitude which surrounds me. I am afraid of having nothing to hold on to, I who have so complained of having just that.' Here we see him alone, with nothing, no longer feeling anything important; under the guise of freedom he is left with the void he has sought and which he finds in himself. And yet this solitude frightens him, he 'shudders' at it. So what is he missing? When, separated from others, he finds a love that illumines this void, he can dream of reconquering it by conquering the person he loves. When, tied to others, he suffers from not being able to communicate with them because no longer separated, he can still, by trying to free himself, live this absence in the presence which is the obstacle to it. But if he has the absence itself, if it ceases to be unattainable and becomes that which he has, then he has more than he can stand, he falls into a state of satiety, he is more dead than alive, a state which we can describe by saying that when he has nothing he has too much.

We could add more to this. The essential feature of Constant's drama is that, in the purest way, with all the force of a singular sensibility he lives this paradox: that we have no relations with others unless we are not confounded with them, we can only communicate fully with them if we possess not what they are, but what separates us from them, their absence rather than their presence, and, even more, the infinite impulse to overcome and yet re-create this absence. It is clear that Constant associates all those states symbolizing it with the gulf which so obsesses him. We know that the idea of death hardly ever left him. 'I am all dust. As it must finish with that it might as well begin with that.' 'I am not, never will be, never can be happy . . . and at the end

of all this is nothingness.' But there is something even more remarkable; his strange need to mark the beginning of his passions by an attempt at suicide, either seriously, or by a confused comedy in which the chances are evenly divided. We could say that in seeking the real void of death he was trying to trap by magic that other void, more difficult to attain, which is the condition of any attachment to a human being. Even with Mlle Pourras who was only a passing fancy and with whom he played out, alone, a novel in which he didn't believe, he still had to drink his little flask of opium. With Madame de Staël he really was at death's door, and we learn that Constant always carried with him something which could kill him and its antidote. Finally, when he meets Madame Récamier, death is round every corner.

We have noticed that Benjamin's lucidity went hand in hand with his sensibility and that, far from drowning them, his reflections gave added force to his passions. 'This sensibility grows by the very reflection which in others diminished it,' said his cousin Rosalie. But this is because his lucidity expresses the same impulse as his desire. He judges and sees things profoundly because he is always external to what he sees. He knew himself better than anyone else because what he felt was felt as the absence of what he wanted to feel, and this margin ensured the neutrality of his glance. Thus, the extreme liveliness of his mind finds more resources than obstacles in his desires, the more awake his mind is, the less it tends to confuse itself with the object it contemplates, but separates itself, and embraces it from afar, in the gulf across which it apprehends it. This is to say that his mind seeks to understand through the absence of the thing understood, just as his desire tries to realize itself through the lack of what he desires.

His is an extraordinary adventure because it is complete in itself, and because it illustrates the way human nature behaves when its object is the condition of its very possibility. It will be easier to see how really original Constant was if we compare him to Proust. Proust also only moves towards something which is moving away. What he has is too much, what he knows is nothing to him. 'My heart is wearied by all it has and regrets all it has not' can be countered by the remark in *La Prisonnière*: 'Every creature we love, however slightly, every creature is for us a Janus, with a face that pleases if they are departing, and a sad face if we know they are at our perpetual disposal'. If Proust only

loves Albertine when she starts leaving him, and if, when she is there, he only loves the person in her who escapes him because she contains 'so many wasted days', a time for ever unknown and for ever lost, if he attaches himself desperately to her each time he feels she is somewhere else, that she belongs to another life and to other people, it is doubtless because the object of his love and that which he seeks is an absence. A necessary absence because he can only enjoy reality in his imagination. ('My imagination which was my only means of enjoying beauty could not apply itself to it (reality) by virtue of the inevitable law which makes it impossible to imagine anything unless it is absent.')

So we are very near to Benjamin's feelings. Proust, like Adolphe, experiences the paradox of all communication (which is also the paradox of language), according to which relationships are based on their very impossibility, and what unites people is what separates them, and what makes them strangers to each other is what brings them together. Both of them tire of the presence of the loved one because it is a contact and not an authentic relationship. Only (it would seem) unlike Constant, Proust does not seek this absence as the real means of communication; he does not really want it, but it is through it that people become desirable to him by making him suffer from not being able to reach them. In Proust, suffering and desire come from what is inaccessible to him and inalienable from others in the person he loves; with Constant, suffering comes from the intimacy which he finds with one person and which makes all the others inaccessible to him, from the necessity of losing in the one he loves the possibility of communicating with all the others. In *La Prisonnière* Proust desires the one thing he cannot imprison—her freedom. Constant wants to find through one person the freedom to desire in general. This is why in Proust, love is suffering because he can only love through jealousy, and he suffers not because he has lost the ability to love others than Albertine, but because Albertine is still free for others. Constant on the other hand is scarcely ever jealous. Adolphe is pleased to see the friends with whom Ellénore surrounds herself and who might take her away from him. If he suffers it is more for what he has than for what might be taken from him: if he suffers it is through the pain he causes which at the moment of rupture renews the reasons for being unable to leave.

These differences are slight and are not essential. Proust loves

because he suffers, and he suffers from feeling all there is of absence in a presence which can always elude him; but it is also because of this absence that the presence is able to build up a real relationship. Constant starts to love when a particular person lights up and magnetizes the whole gulf which separates him from others.

And from the moment that through a too whole-hearted commitment he loses the relationship with others which he wanted to live through one person, then he stifles and collapses. He needs to be free, but he is always tied. Because this freedom he seeks is not freedom for himself but the freedom to belong to others. When he fails to break with Madame de Staël he secretly marries Charlotte with whom he was in love, doubtless, and whom he has been delighted to find again twelve years after their first affair. But the day after this delightful re-encounter he writes: 'Evening with Charlotte. Will the fever pass and boredom set in again? I am horribly afraid of it.' The secret marriage with Charlotte represents an attempt to restore through the ambiguity of a double presence the absence which alone can make him master of his relationships with the world. Finally, if he thinks the sufferings he causes others both very serious and very wicked it is because this suffering is for others the same mutilation which the loss of his own liberty is for himself. A person to whom he causes suffering is a person whom he has united to himself even while destroying them. From this comes the muddled and equivocal character of his feelings after each ghastly scene; when he sees Madame de Staël before him shaking and weeping with suffering he understands just how much power he has over her, and this abundance of power is the sign of the excessive ties which bind them together, of the distance which they have obliterated, of the loss of their double liberty and he feels as much shame as disgust. But at the same time this suffering which he causes is a way of diminishing others, of destroying them, of sending them far away. And he feels the relief of this and perhaps a renewal of desire, so much so that after each entry 'Appalling scene, ghastly night', he must also write: 'Everything is different, a magical power dominates me, my feelings of attachment have returned,' because the scenes which are the sign of the destruction of their mutual liberty are also like the troubled dawn of a new freedom.

Two traits are striking in the similarity between Proust and

Constant; in both lucidity accompanies a violence of feeling; their way of approaching others when they love them, is the way in which they approach themselves so as to know themselves. And it is also remarkable that the symbol-images which Proust uses to describe his love for Albertine are outlined by Constant. It is when asleep that Albertine becomes one with the strange love Proust has for her: it is then that her absence appears as present, sleep realizes without dissipating the strangeness that is in her, yielding up this unknown person who can never be caught unaware, whose freedom can never be bound; the young girl is herself at last and all that she is, now is candidly bare, admitted, given him. 'Her personality did not escape as when we were talking, by the channels of her unacknowledged thoughts and of her gaze. She had called back into herself everything of her that lay outside, had taken refuge, enclosed, reabsorbed, in her body. In keeping her before my eyes, in my hands, I had that impression of possessing her altogether, which I never had when she was awake . . . My jealousy grew calm, for I felt that Albertine had become a creature that breathes, that is nothing else besides, as was indicated by that regular breathing in which is expressed that pure physiological function which, wholly fluid, has not the solidity either of speech or of silence; and, in its ignorance of all evil, her breath, drawn (it seemed) rather from a hollow reed than from a human being, was truly paradisaical, was the pure song of the angels to me, who at these moments, felt Albertine to be withdrawn from everything, not only materially but morally.'

In a celebrated passage Proust points out that the real meaning of a novel is found in the symbols and the phrases which reveal its obsessive secret. Albertine asleep is one of these symbols. And a similar image is the young English girl whom Constant mentions with such distress, who is half alive and who from fainting *fit to fainting fit* passes from crime to death. And yet another of these symbols is the sleep which in his *Journal* he compares to the infatuation of certain women, a comparison which, by coincidence, Julie Talma takes up to describe the 'eternal loves' of Benjamin which, she says, he enters as some men enter sleep. This metaphor cannot be without meaning. If in sleep Albertine's life is abstracted from everything else and so made perceptible through this universal withdrawal it is because sleep shows us not so much

people, as people in parenthesis, their relationships suspended and hence embodied in a pure state, in the profound drowsiness that only their awakening can make known to desire.

Adolphe is a tranquil and discreet novel, says Albert Thibaudet. Discreet, yes, tranquil, if you like, if tranquillity is what conceals violence and hides the greatest tragedy beneath its surface. We have seen that the interest of the book is not just in the passions described, nor even in the subtilty and the force of the analysis. Feelings and analysis here are only a means of illuminating a fatal path; one of the thousand detours which make us see the vicious circle of human relationships which can only end—whatever path is chosen—in mutual misery. We cannot mistake this and Constant has said it. ‘Some people have asked me what *Adolphe* should have done to feel and cause less pain. His position, like Ellénore’s, is hopeless and that is precisely what I wanted. I have show him tormented because he did not love Ellénore passionately, but he wouldn’t have been less tormented if he had loved her more. He suffered with her through his lack of feeling; with more feeling he would have suffered for her . . . When we start these things, we have no recourse except a choice of evils.’ Could any warning be more clear? So let us then stop seeing in *Adolphe* the tragedy of a particular feeling, of a particular character, since it is a tragedy about our human situation where, whatever our sentiment and whatever our character, we are destined to the same fatality.

The drama comes from the vicious circle of human relationships, whenever those who live them choose to do so in the fullness of their possibilities, that is to say their truth. He who chooses to find in others the feeling which attracts him to others, can only sadly repeat the conclusion of Constant: ‘With sincerity I have done nothing but make others and myself unhappy’ because the truth makes for unhappiness just as lucidity precipitates it. Once the first step has been taken, once the necessity has been felt of reaching in another the movement by which they can be reached, and of living it in such a way as to preserve and save the possibility of having such a movement, then neither strangeness of circumstance, nor strength of feeling, nor nobility of character, can change anything. If he had loved Ellénore more, *Adolphe* would have felt even more strongly the need to break with her because his passion would more than ever have acted against the

truth of his passion; but he would have been even more strongly prevented from breaking away, more incapable of supporting the suffering which this break could only bring. As for Ellénore, had she been less attached to Adolphe, she would only have allowed him to be free to the extent to which he would have suffered from it, and by suffering, forced her to take him back. And, moreover, this pattern is so much the real one of the book that the perpetual pendulum even comes out in the last episode. By an ironical revelation the dead Ellénore divulges the letter in which she consents to a separation: 'What strange pity makes you afraid to break a tie that weighs on you, and to tear yourself from the unhappy being near whom your pity keeps you? Why do you deny yourself the sad pleasure of believing yourself at least generous? Why show yourself furious and weak? The idea of my suffering haunts you, and the spectacle of it cannot stop you. What do you want?' Thus at the death-bed which breaks all links and gives him back the freedom to feel the feelings he can no longer live, Adolphe receives from the very person who had restrained him the permission to be free. The permission comes too late and seems to have been given so as to poison the freedom which now weighs more heavily on him than all his ties ever did.

On nearly every page of *Adolphe* we find a description of feelings whose cause could easily have been the opposite, for everything thrusts them back on themselves and confirms the fatality of the movement. For we have reached the point where the diversity of events and all the infinite variety of the world can only tirelessly emphasize the vicious circle wherein the heart which seeks after truth, is imprisoned. When Adolphe writes: 'I was upset when she seemed to doubt the love which was so necessary to her; I was no less upset when she seemed to believe it'. Or again, 'When Ellénore found me gloomy or depressed she was first upset, then hurt, and tore from me with her reproaches the admission of the boredom I wanted to conceal; for my part, when Ellénore seemed happy, I was irritated to see her enjoy a situation which cost me my own happiness, and I upset her short term of joy with insinuations as to what I felt inwardly,' we feel that the balance of the sentences, their symmetrical opposition, only translate through this form the demands of a situation in which we got from contrary to contrary without change and without rest. All the vigour of the book comes from the fatality

of this movement. All its tragic power comes from this repetition, which, ceaselessly exacerbating the feelings and making them more violent, and because of this violence more ineluctably doomed to turn back on themselves, makes of monotony the first step into an extraordinary descent into catastrophe.

In his Journal, Constant has noted in connexion with suffering, how passions turn into destiny. If one goes to meet suffering it must be gone through to be escaped. If one flies from it, because it always catches up with you, one also suffers the weakness of having fled. 'Suffering is a serpent which glides through all barriers and finds you always. The very action of flying from it gives you a feeling of weakness which makes you less able to hold your own when it catches up with you.' Of the two opposing loves of his life the first showed him to be incapable of loving and the second incapable of making himself loved, and this has often been seen as the irony of chance. But the opposition is more profound and is not the result of the caprice of fate. He did not love Madame de Staël less than he loved Madame Récamier; the letters, his behaviour, his foolishness, all confirm this. But having chosen sincerity he could only choose the inextricable, and his two great passions exposed him to one and the same disaster by facing him with the two contradictory sides of his sentimental destiny. He loves and is greatly loved; here is his first chance. But the person he chose to love, who is neither intolerant nor exclusive ('Love requires a lot of people', she said, 'as soon as there are two there have to be so many more') and who offered him one of the rare opportunities of freedom, has as her principal characteristic what Charles du Bos called a 'semi-scared' horror of separation. She cannot bear even the thought of it and so he makes vows and promises which are the very things most calculated to exhaust the feelings she most wants him to give her. And Benjamin promises light-heartedly because he himself had always hoped to find in marriage or the facsimile of marriage, the means of preserving a passion which the presence of the loved one banishes. But, the minute he has committed himself, passion becomes impossible and all that remains of it impels him to break with the one person for whom separation is worse than death. What can he do then? Love freely, love without the servitude of a shared love? So he meets Madame Récamier, he meets the person who has the greatest incapacity for feeling, the greatest naivety of indifference

and coldness for him and for everyone else, the person who, according to Sainte-Beuve, wanted to make the seasons stop in April; the person, in fact, best fitted to excite passion to the heights of madness, to make him desire all the pleasures of summer and lead him to lose himself in promises and slavery.

Such is the rigidity of the law. Of course situations are cleared up, but only in appearance. Constant can leave Madame de Staël, he can resign himself to the superficiality of Madame Récamier; all that is truest in his feelings returns ceaselessly to his first love ('Madame de Staël is indeed lost to me. I shall never get over it') and burn perpetually at the coldness of the second. And so it was that this man whose character was indifference, the prototype of the bored in spirit, found, to express the meaning of his life, the very words that, half a century later, Nietzsche came across in his burning loneliness:

Unquenched as flame
I burn to consume myself.
What I touch becomes light
Carbon what I quit,
Surely I am fire.

In Constant's words to Juliette Récamier: 'I am destined to illuminate you by consuming myself.'

[*Translated by* LIONEL ABEL]

LIONEL TRILLING

THE LESSON AND THE SECRET

THE nine women of the Techniques of Creative Writing Group sat awaiting the arrival of their instructor, Vincent Hammell. He was not late but they were early and some of them were impatient. The room they sat in was beautiful and bright; its broad windows looked out on the little lake around which the buildings of the city's new cultural centre were grouped. The women were disposed about a table of plate glass and their nine hand-bags lay in an archipelago upon its great lucid surface.

Mrs. Stocker said, 'Mr. Hammell isn't here, it seems'. There was the intention of irony in her voice—she put a querulous emphasis on the 'seems'.

Miss Anderson said, 'Oh, but it's that we are early—because of our being at the luncheon'. She glanced for confirmation at the watch on her wrist.

'Perhaps so,' Mrs. Stocker said. 'But you know, Constance, speaking metaphorically, Hammell is *not here*, he—is—just—not—here.'

At this remark there were nods of considered agreement. Mrs. Territt said, 'I think so too. I agree', and brought the palm of her hand down upon her thigh in a sharp slap of decision.

Mrs. Stocker ignored this undesirable ally. She went on, 'Not really *here* at all. Oh, I grant you that he is brilliant in a theoretical sense. But those of us who come here'—she spoke tenderly, as if referring to a sacrifice in a public cause—'those of us who come here come for practice, not for theory. You can test the matter very easily—you can test it by results. And you know as well as I do, Constance, that—there—are—just—no—results—at—all.'

Miss Anderson had gone through uprisings like this every spring and she knew that there was no standing against Mrs. Stocker. Mrs. Stocker would have her own way, especially since the group that opposed her was so small and uncourageous, consisting, in addition to Miss Anderson herself, only of Mrs. Knight and Miss Wilson. Young Mrs. Knight was extremely

faithful and quite successful in carrying out the class assignments and this naturally put her under suspicion of being prejudiced in favour of the instructor. Her opinion was bound to be discounted. As for Miss Wilson, her presence in the group was generally supposed to have merely the therapeutic purpose of occupying her unhappy mind. It was not a frequent presence, for she shrank from society, and now she looked miserably away from the insupportable spectacle of anyone's being blamed for anything whatsoever.

Miss Anderson said, 'But surely we can't blame that all on Mr. Hammell'.

'No, not all,' Mrs. Stocker conceded handsomely because it was so little to concede. 'I grant you it isn't *all* his fault. But I think we have the right to expect—it isn't as if we weren't paying. And generously, too, I might add. And there's nothing to show. Not one of us has sold herself.'

Mrs. Territt gave vent to an explosive snicker. At once Mrs. Stocker traced the reason for the outburst to Mrs. Territt's primitive sexual imagination and said sharply, 'Not one of us has sold herself to a single magazine. Not one of us has put herself across.'

Of the nine women, all were very wealthy. They made Vincent Hammell's first experience of wealth, and nothing he had learned from books had prepared him for what he found. It seemed to Vincent that only in the case of Miss Anderson had wealth been a true condition of life, shaping and marking her as nothing else could have done. She alone bore something of the imagined appearance of wealth, the serenity and disinterestedness to which wealth is supposed ideally to aspire.

Vincent supposed that either the size or the age or the nature of Miss Anderson's fortune had led her—as fortunes of a kind sometimes do—into an historical lapse, an aberration of her sense of time. For Miss Anderson, although not 'old-fashioned' nor long past her youth, seemed not to inhabit quite the same present in which her friends lived. She seemed, indeed, to live in reference to certain delicate points of honour such as Edith Wharton, but few after her, would have been concerned with. Vincent assumed, for example, that some high moral decision, its meaning now obscured, accounted for the unmarried state of a woman so pleasant as Miss Anderson. It was surely to be laid to some sacrifice of herself, some service of an idea. The idea which she served

would not have to be very complex or important, but still it was an idea. Perhaps this explained the historical impression she made, for to many people the present consists of things, while the past consists of ideas. Like the past, Miss Anderson was a failure. Yet in some way she continued to exist with a gentle unsought authority which perhaps came from her friends' dim response to the power of the idea and their recognition of the magical, if limited, potency of the past; she was not aggressive or competitive and it was felt that she shed a justification upon whatever groups she joined.

Now and then Miss Anderson submitted to Vincent's criticism the stories she wrote. They were elaborate and literate—well-written, the class called them—but they had no relation to any reality Vincent could identify. In the world of Miss Anderson's stories, servants were old and loyal; wives hid nameless diseases from their husbands or silently bore the most torturing infidelities, or found themselves hideously in the power of depraved lovers; memories played a great part, the memories of single passionate nights or of single significant phrases, and it sometimes happened that flowers or white gloves were forever cherished. When Vincent discussed these stories with Miss Anderson, he was always surprised at the small conviction with which he spoke about their lack of reality—he almost believed, as he spoke to her, that there might actually be such a world beyond his strict modern knowledge.

The distinction which Miss Anderson had was perhaps but a weak one, yet it gave Vincent Hammell a standard by which he could fairly measure the inadequacy of her colleagues. If she did not carry the power of her position, she at least carried its tragic consciousness. Wealth and position, Vincent felt, should appear in their proper forms and add to the variety of life. He was sure that there were proper forms both of refinement and vulgarity. But these women made but a commonplace spectacle. Thus, the meagre taste in dress of Mrs. Stocker quite matched the meagreness of her face, which showed the irritable energy of a person whose social self-esteem is not matched by cash in the bank. Or Mrs. Territt was so very coarse in complexion, so drab in dress and so brutally dull in manner that it was inevitable to suppose that what gentility she had was hanging by only a thread of income. Mrs. Knight was ruddy and healthy from an expensive outdoor

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life, but in other respects she appeared no more than merely well off. Poor Miss Wilson's truly painful nervousness and her evasive eye quite transcended the bounds of class.

Yet, on the other hand, it was even more difficult to believe in the actual status of Mrs. Broughton, Mrs. Forrester and old Mrs. Pomeroy, for wealth had marked them only in the way of parody and they were all so 'typical' that one had to suppose that they had been produced not so much by nature and circumstance as by certain artistic imaginations of rather limited range. Vincent felt that in the East, in New York or Boston, cities of complex culture, wealth would surely make a better show, would impart a more firmly bottomed assurance, a truer arrogance. Then, too, he could suppose that these women were the failures and misfits of their class, else they would not have to meet weekly to devote themselves to literature.

'I have nothing against Hammell personally, nothing whatsoever,' Mrs. Stocker said. 'What I think is that we need a different *kind* of person. Hammell is very modern, but we need somebody more practical. It seems to me that if we could have a literary agent, who could give us the straight dope, tell us about contacts and the right approach . . .'

Mrs. Stocker had no need to complete her conditional clause. The straight dope, the contacts and the right approach, went directly to the hearts of Mrs. Territt, Mrs. Broughton, and Mrs. Forrester. They murmured a surprised approval of the firm originality of the suggestion. Even old Mrs. Pomeroy raised her eyebrows to indicate that although human nature did not change, it sometimes appeared in interesting new aspects. To all the ladies, indeed, it came as a relief that Mrs. Stocker should suggest that there was another secret than that of creation. There was a power possibly more efficacious, the secret of selling, of contacts and the right approach.

Miss Anderson said, 'But aren't all the literary agents in New York?' She said it tentatively, for she was without worldly knowledge, but what she said was so sensibly true that the general enthusiasm was dampened.

'But surely,' Mrs. Stocker said, and her voice was almost desperate, 'but surely there must be somebody?'

Mrs. Broughton, who was staring out of the window, said, 'Here he comes', whispering it like a guilty conspiratorial

schoolgirl. Mrs. Forrester closed her dark expressive eyes to the group to signal 'mum' and the ladies composed their faces.

Could Vincent Hammell have heard the conversation of which he was the subject, he would have been surprised by only one element in it—the lack of any response to him personally. He knew he was not succeeding with the group, but he knew, too, that none of the instructors who had come before him had succeeded any better. The university had sent its best men, professors first, then young assistants likely to be more modern. Each autumn the new man had been received with taut feminine expectancy; each spring he had been discarded, for he had not conveyed the precious, the inconceivable secret which the women had come in hopes to receive. Yet though Hammell might understand that he was not successful, he always supposed that he was a little forgiven by reason of his sex and age. He was wrong to count on this feminine extenuation—his masculinity and youth made his case, if anything, even worse.

His failure had no doubt begun when, upon being invited to instruct the group, he had conjured up a vision of gently bred ladies, all pretty and all precisely thirty years old, gracefully filling empty days and hearts with the delicate practice of a craft humbly loved. He had not been prepared for the urgent women who were actually his pupils, nor for their grim dark worship of the potency that print conferred, nor for their belief—more intense than any coterie in metropolitan garrets could have—that they were held in bondage by a great conspiracy of editors.

Vincent Hammell was carrying his brief-case, an elegant piece of luggage of excellent leather and the best bronze hardware. It had been a gift from his parents, who, with such gifts, useful but very fine and extravagant, kept for themselves and their son the memory and hope of better days. Vincent was glad of the brief-case, for it helped to arm his youth and poverty against the wealth and years of his pupils. He laid it on the plate-glass table beneath which his own legs and the legs of the women were visible. He opened it and took out a thin folder of manuscript. Miss Anderson cleared her throat, caught the eye of member after member and brought the meeting to order. Hammell looked up and took over the class. It was only his entrance into the room that gave him trouble and now he spoke briskly and with authority.

'Two weeks ago,' he said, 'I asked you to write an account of

some simple outdoor experience. You were to concentrate on the physical details. You remember we discussed as models a passage from *Huckleberry Finn* and a story of Ernest Hemingway's.' He picked up the folder of manuscript and examined its thinness. 'Some of you,' he said drily, 'carried out the assignment.'

Mrs. Stocker moved in her seat to signalize a protest which Vincent understood—all this was elementary. 'I'd like to read one example,' he said.

He took a manuscript from the folder. Only three of the women had attempted the assignment, two of them dully. But he was rather proud of Mrs. Knight's little story. It was quite unpretentious, about a young wife who is left by her husband in their hunting lodge in the Canadian woods. She wakes in the night to hear a howling that can be only that of wild animals and then the creaking hinge of an unlatched door opening and closing. She is not alone, but of the two guests one is another woman and the man is incompetent. She lies still and miserable, bearing all the sad isolation of responsibility; the conflict of her emotions is not between fear of the beasts and the impulse to protect herself, but between fear of the beasts and fear of her husband's contempt for her lack of courage. But at last she becomes bold—and finds that though indeed the door is unlatched, the howling is only that of a high wind. It was perhaps not entirely convincing that she should have deceived herself, but something in the matter of the story was indeed convincing, her desire to seem manly to her husband, and the whole impulse of the story itself to discover safety where danger had been imagined.

Vincent began to read this story aloud. Just then the door opened and two women came in. They made little gestures of greeting to their friends and politely indicated, by exhibiting how they were out of breath, that their lateness had been unavoidable. Vincent waited for them to settle and then again began to read. When he came to the end, he paused for a while and looked around the table.

'What do you think of it?' he asked.

'Very nice,' Mrs. Broughton said. 'Very nice indeed.' Mrs. Broughton, it always seemed to Vincent, had been imagined by a radical caricaturist of rather conventional fancy. Careless of verisimilitude, concerned only with the political passions he would arouse, the artist had drawn her short and pudgy, with a face of

gross and foolish pride and a bridling neck which gave an air of condescension to her remarks, many of which were in their intention really quite good-natured. Mrs. Knight was not gratified by Mrs. Broughton's praise.

'Yes, it is very nice,' Mrs. Stocker said, suppressing as much as she could the condescension she felt. 'Of course, it has no plot, no complication, no conflict really, but it has a kind of twist at the end, it is true to life and it has touches of realism.'

'Oh, very realistic,' said Mrs. Broughton.

'Well, I don't think it is very realistic,' said Mrs. Forrester with sudden authority. As compared with the inventor of Mrs. Broughton, the imagination that had conceived Mrs. Forrester was of greater complexity—some social satirist, gifted but not profound, had projected this elegant woman, not young but still beautiful, and had endowed her with an intensity of self-regard and a sense of *noblesse* so petulant and shoulder-shrugging, yet so easily snubbed, that poor Mrs. Forrester lived in a constant alternation of blind attack and bewildered retreat, with the result that since her beautiful girlhood scarcely anyone had felt towards her any emotion save the various degrees of contempt. 'Not at all—to me it doesn't seem at all realistic.' She held her pretty head high to front the refutation which her judgements inevitably and bewilderingly provoked. 'It isn't *convincing*,' she said. 'Now take the central problem—yes, take the central *problem*. That definitely is *not* convincing. She lies there worrying about what she should do. *Why? What for?*', her appeal was vehement. 'All she had to do was ring for the guides, and that would be that!' Her beautiful dark eyes flashed finality.

There was a gasp from Mrs. Knight. Her cheeks flamed. She almost rose from her chair. Her voice was choked. 'It just so happens,' she said with terrible scorn, 'it just so happens that she couldn't ring for the guides because in our lodge—there—are—no—guides—to—ring—for.'

The group was wholly with Mrs. Knight in the matter. They had a natural feeling for the appropriate simplicity of a nice young couple who ran their lodge in Canada without guides; the guides would come in time. As usual Mrs. Forrester was silenced.

Mrs. Stocker said, 'Mr. Hammell, I gather that you like that story of Mrs. Knight's. And I like it too. It was a very fresh

quality, definitely fresh. But the question I want to ask is whether in your opinion a story like that has a marketable value.'

There were little nods around the table as the spirit of the junta asserted itself once more, but there was a constraining sense of guilt now that Vincent Hammell was here. Mrs. Knight looked very conscious. She was humble about her writing and near enough to her college days to submit to the discipline of an assigned exercise, but she was naturally not averse to knowing whether or not she had produced a commodity.

'Now you take Constance's stories—Miss Anderson's stories, Mr. Hammell. You yourself admit that they have something. They're well thought out and they're well written, they have suspense and a twist at the end. But the editors just never take them.'

Miss Anderson looked up in surprise and unhappiness. Although now and then she sent her stories to market, she seemed to feel no chagrin at their refusal.

'Now why do you think that is, Mr. Hammell?' Mrs. Stocker said. There was a silence, a degree of attention that Hammell saw the significance in. He considered how to answer. Miss Anderson looked withdrawn from the inquisition.

Mrs. Broughton broke the silence. 'It's because they are refined and charming and what they want nowadays is coarse—and middle class. About miners. There was a story I read about two children who could hear each other practising the piano through the walls of their apartment.' She tossed her head in resentment. 'Who cares?'

Mrs. Territt broke in and her coarse voice was injured and defensive. She said, 'You all talk about selling stories. What I want to know is how to write them. That's what I came here to find out.' She looked hostilely at Vincent. 'All this talk about what's been done already! I came here to learn *how to do it at all!*'

Three or four women were swayed by this utterance to confess among themselves what they had never before realized. 'Yes, yes,' they murmured and nodded to each other. The group was now divided between those who believed that the secret lay in learning to sell and those who believed that it lay in learning to write.

'Personally,' Mrs. Territt said, and her glance at Hammell was now malevolent, 'personally, that is what I give up my time to

come here for. And I haven't got it—*nothing*.' The murmur of agreement she had won had gone to her head and she was breathing hard.

Vincent said, 'Mrs. Territt, one can only learn to write by writing'. For the fact was that Mrs. Territt had never yet submitted a manuscript.

She bridled. 'I suppose that's very smart.' She used the word *smart* not in the English sense of something clean and precise or fashionable and elegant, but in the old American sense of something clever and impertinent. In the eyes of all present this de-classed her.

Vincent said, 'How long do you spend at your desk every day, Mrs. Territt?'

She did not answer but looked sullenly at the table before her.

'Four hours a day?' Vincent said inexorably. He could feel the solidifying interest of the group. The many handsomely shod feet seen through the top of the table looked like aquarial creatures as they shifted a little with interest.

'Three hours? Two? One solid hour every day?'

Mrs. Territt was sulking like a scolded chambermaid with an inexpressible grievance. Suddenly she flashed out, 'No, why should I? When I never get any ideas?' It was a direct accusation against Hammell.

Someone snickered and no doubt the fight was won, but Hammell went on: 'How long do you spend every day trying to get ideas?'

She looked at him blankly from her raging sulks.

It was necessary to bring the matter to an end. Vincent took a book from his brief-case. It was a volume of stories by a writer he much admired, Garda Thorne. 'Shall we continue the class?' he said. The women nodded.

Vincent began to read aloud the story he had selected. It was about two young American girls who were visiting friends in an Austrian village. They were Catholics and they were sent by their hostess to pay a call of ceremony on the priest of the village. The priest had received them charmingly, he was very polite. He was in an especially good humour because the new wine from the grapes of his own little arbour was just ready. It stood in his tin bath-tub on the floor. Just as the visit began, the priest was urgently sent for. He begged his young guests to remain until his return.

They could not but agree, yet as his absence continued they sat there bored and impatient and wondering how to amuse themselves until first one and then the other took off her shoes and stockings, held her skirts high and stepped into the tub. If you stopped to think of it, it was not quite probable, but it was a wonderfully funny and charming picture, the first girl standing in the wine, then the second, then both together, elegantly dressed and with their wide straw hats on, the drops of red wine splashing up to their thighs, their white feet and ankles scarcely visible to themselves as they looked down into the roiled wine.

Then there was the scramble to get themselves decent before the priest should come home, the scrubbing with inadequate handkerchiefs, the sanding of the stone floor to clean off the prints of their feet. When the priest returned they had to sit there demure, with their legs still sticky under their stockings. The priest served them the wine they had bathed in and their manners were perfect as they heard him say that never had he known the wine to be so good.

As the story went on to its end, Vincent was sorry he had chosen it to read. The silence was becoming unusually intense. He had especially wanted Miss Anderson to hear the story, for he thought it might suggest to her, with its simplicity, gaiety and elegance, that there were better subjects than the unreal complexities she so feelingly conceived. But, as he read, he felt that it had been a cruel mistake to read this story to these women. As it went on through its narration of the flash of skirts and underskirts, of white stained thighs, the grave silence of the girls and then their giggles and the beautiful prints of their naked feet on the stone floor, it seemed to him that his own youth had been thoughtless to have chosen the story. He felt, too, like an intruder into feminine mysteries and the sweat came to his forehead. He dreaded the return of the priest and the end of the story when he would have to take his eyes from the book and look around. At last he finished. He did not look up but moodily sifted through the pages of the book. This had the histrionic effect of letting the story hang for a while in the air.

For a moment the silence continued. Then it was broken by Miss Anderson, crying, 'Oh that was lovely, Mr. Hammell,' and 'lovely,' 'lovely,' 'lovely,' echoed the women around the glass table, beneath whose surface there was a shifting of legs and a pulling down of skirts over knees.

Vincent Hammell now ventured to look at their faces, which were relaxed and benign. There were little half-smiles on their mouths, directed tangentially at him. It was as if he himself had been the author of the story and as if the story had celebrated the things that were their peculiar possessions, their youth, their beauty, their femininity.

In the sunlit room, in the soft spring air, there was a moment of musing silence as the quest for the precious secret was abandoned. Despite himself, Vincent Hammell experienced a sense of power, in all his months of teaching the class the first he had felt. Yet in the entrancement of the women, in their moment of brooding relaxation, there was something archaic and mythological, something latently dangerous. It was thus that the women of Thrace must have sat around Orpheus before they had had occasion to be enraged with him. He would have liked to remind them, but it was not possible, that he had merely read aloud to them the story which a woman, Garda Thorne, had written.

It was old Mrs. Pomeroy who memorialized the moment. Mrs. Pomeroy was by far a gayer creation than either Mrs. Broughton or Mrs. Forrester. Perhaps she was aware of her role, perhaps she had even had the charming wit to invent it herself—she was the old lady of widest experience and profoundest wisdom and it was impossible not to see her lengthy past of drawing-rooms (at home and abroad) in which the brilliant and the famous were received. Silence and a twinkle were the evidences of Mrs. Pomeroy's breadth of culture. At certain literary names she would smile, as at the memory of old, intimate and special delights. But only once had she made vocal her feeling for the great past. On that occasion the name of Proust had been mentioned by Vincent Hammell and what Mrs. Pomeroy had said was, 'And also Paul Bourget'. She had added a knowledgeable whisper of explanation, 'psychology!' And now, as her way was, she smiled sadly and wisely as she spoke. She closed her eyes and said, 'Such a story makes one truly glad there is literature. We should be grateful.'

She spoke so seldom and perhaps she was really wise—at her benediction upon literature and her admonition to gratitude everyone looked solemn, as if, in the moving picture, they were listening to Anatole France delivering the panegyric at Zola's funeral. 'Very excellent,' said Mrs. Broughton. 'Very.'

And now Mrs. Stocker spoke. 'What I like about the story,'

she said, 'is that it is neither one thing nor another. I mean that it isn't highbrow or commercial.'

It was not that she wanted to bring the discussion back again to the matter which so much interested her. No doubt she as much as anyone else had been caught in the moment of contemplation, but in uttering her feeling about it she used the only language she knew. And having used that language it was now natural for her to say, 'Tell me, Mr. Hammell, does this writer sell well?'

At the question there was a noisy little murmur of agreement to its relevance as the eyes turned to Vincent Hammell to demand his answer.

RENÉ LEIBOWITZ

ARNOLD SCHOENBERG'S SURVIVOR FROM WARSAW OR THE POSSIBILITY OF 'COMMITTED' ART

As soon as there are in this world connoisseurs of horses, the finest race-horses suddenly appear. The fact is that there always have been such race-horses, but the connoisseurs are very rare.

HAN YU, *Considerations on Race-Horses*

I

THE interference of political and social questions into the realm of artistic creation has recently been, and still is, one of the most acute and alarming problems where the artist's freedom of choice and commitment both on the social and the aesthetic plane are concerned. Although, as I have endeavoured to show elsewhere,¹ such a situation is not by any means new, and although some of its contradictions and inconsistencies are only too obvious, I do not think it superfluous to re-examine the matter from a different angle and to clarify some of its more hidden implications.

¹ 'Le Musicien Engagé', in *Temps Modernes*, No. 40.

Most of the interferences which we are referring to amount to a more or less open attack against what is called 'modern art' (a very vague concept which, of course, nobody takes the trouble to define) in the name of an 'art for the masses' or something similar (and these notions also lack completely in clarity and definition). In spite of some variation in tone and formulation, it is, I think, quite safe to say that wherever these attacks come from and whatever political or social group expresses them, they all take their roots in the same moral and artistic reactions.

I have also tried to show¹ that the fundamental characteristic of such an attitude is the total incapacity of facing, understanding and accepting clearly, and with lucidity, the most radical acquisitions of the best art of one's time. The fear of the difficulties and complexities of these acquisitions is necessarily combined with a nostalgia for 'simpler' means of expression and for the 'good old days' or whatever one chooses to call it. One forgets that these simpler means of expression only seem simple because they have become familiar (whereas they seemed just as hair-raising and abstruse when they came into being) and that the good old days were the 'bad new days' of another epoch during which there were also advanced artists and their conservative enemies. Whatever the arguments and attacks, their implicit goal is to control, to limit, or even to suppress artistic freedom (and freedom in general) of which the radical innovations of authentic creations are the purest and highest expression. For the deep sense of our great artistic tradition lies precisely in the boldness and in the subversion of those who have made it, so that one is justified in saying that this tradition finally amounts to an infinite chain of acts of freedom. Thus freedom in general, far from being a static concept, has to be reconquered with every undertaking and finally appears as the result of continuous victories within which man, transcending his own limitations, thrusts himself into the unknown, mysterious and frightening complexities of the new means of expression which face his consciousness at every given historical period.

Such were the main conclusions at which I had arrived in my previous endeavours at analysing the situation to which we have referred at the beginning of this article. Here, by discussing a

¹ loc. cit.

new and precise problem, I should like to illustrate the matter in a more concrete fashion.

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One of the common reactions of the artist who suddenly undertakes to produce a work for some specific social purpose consists of adapting some specific social *subject matter*. The painter will paint a miner and his family after a day of hard work, the poet will write a poem about the battle led by the righteous and deserving against their oppressors, and the musician will set this poem to music. Quite often the artist believes that such a choice is a sufficient guarantee for achieving both a revolutionary content and immediate response from the audience.

But, obviously enough, the situation is not quite so simple. For example, a poem may deal with revolutionary ideas and may, at the same time, be written in the most conventional and academic style. In such a case it may, of course, be easily grasped by even an uneducated audience, but one could hardly say that such a poem deserves being called revolutionary. On the other hand, if the poem is actually revolutionary in style and structure it may not, in spite of references to social realities, be understood by the masses.

When it comes to music, the situation is even more confused. The references to social realities cannot be made explicit in a symphony even if its title should suggest such realities. Many composers believe that they are socially or politically committed when they write a composition based on a text wherein their social or political preoccupations are expressed. Here we are faced once again with problems pertaining specifically to the text itself. This text—poem, libretto, etc.—may be, let us say, revolutionary in ideological content and conservative in structure. Even if it is revolutionary in all its aspects, the music composed on it may be conservative, or it may also use the most advanced idiom. In the latter case, at any rate, it will hardly convince an uneducated audience and it will most probably be considered ‘decadent’ or ‘formalistic’ by the majority of those who, nowadays, have become the champions of ‘progressive’ art.

In any event it is clear that one cannot judge the work of art on its subject matter alone, and that no given subject matter, however progressive or advanced, can guarantee the achievement of a progressive or advanced work of art.

By unfortunately having to state such platitudes one should not, of course, commit the contrary mistake which consists of believing that, in order to become a true artistic achievement the work of art must, by all means, avoid every possible connexion with topical, political or social matters. Both attitudes are equally wrong and for exactly the same reason. Indeed, in both cases, the subject matter is endowed—positively or negatively—with an importance which it does not possess *per se* (that is, when separated from the rest of the work). In other words, the subject matter can only be considered (a) as a mere source of inspiration, (b) as the possibility for the artist to express something which is actually important to him on an extra-artistic plane.

These two points need further investigation and comment.

(a) The artist is of course free to find his inspiration in whatever source he chooses. In this respect there is no reason why he should not be inspired by topical, social or political events if they constitute realities by which he is intensely and genuinely moved. It is obvious that we cannot, and must not, doubt the depth and the sincerity of his emotion, but,

(b) as a possibility of expression of this emotion, the chosen subject matter remains, in spite of everything, a *neutral* element, something like a raw material, which will have to be submitted to a purely artistic treatment. It is finally only the latter which will (or will not) prove the adequacy of the extra-artistic emotion and interest to the purely artistic project. Better still, the value of the work of art based on an extra-artistic subject matter will depend on the degree of adequacy existing between the artistic project and the 'emotional' one.

If the one can become totally absorbed by the other, if no choice hinders the freedom of the other, if both finally spring out from and culminate in a completely radical gesture, then the result will be a great work of art in spite of some extra-artistic elements and—*vice versa*—it will also be a great tribute to social or political realities, in spite of purely artistic preoccupations.

That such an achievement is possible is what we now shall endeavour to show.

II

Schoenberg's last completed work, *A Survivor from Warsaw*,¹ op. 46, is based upon the story of the Nazi purge of the Warsaw ghetto. This story was told to Schoenberg by someone who had actually been exposed to one of the worst massacres and who had survived it. It is upon this that Schoenberg undertook to write his own 'libretto'.

The 'plot' is a very simple one: one morning, as usual, the trumpets sound. The Jews are then assembled and beaten by the Germans, whereupon the sergeant orders his subordinates to count those who, unable to resist the beating, have died, so that the corpses should be delivered to the gas chamber. The 'Survivor' then tells how the act of counting, becoming faster and faster, sounded like a 'stampede of wild horses' and then, 'in the middle of it' those who were still alive started singing the old Hebrew prayer, the 'Shema Yisroel'.

Told in the first person (as though by the 'Survivor' himself), the story is written in a very simple narrative style. It is meant to be recited by a male narrator according to the principles of the specific Schoenbergian technique of the 'Sprechgesang'.²

The Hebrew prayer used at the end is set for a male chorus singing in unison.

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Here, then, we are faced with a completely topical subject based on specific social (and even political) realities. That such a subject should have moved and inspired Schoenberg is, after all, not astonishing, and it would also be absurd to doubt the validity of the subject considered as a potential source of inspiration in general. The point which must be examined here is whether, and how, Schoenberg's inspiration has been able to express itself adequately in purely musical terms.

¹ Written on commission for the Koussevitsky Foundation, in September 1947.

² First used in the musical drama *Die Glückliche Hand*, op. 18, then in the *Pierrot Lunaire*, op. 21, and lately in the *Ode to Napoleon*, op. 41. It consists of a rhythmically very strict narration with relatively free pitch, the inflections of the voice either mounting or descending, being indicated in the score. Given the fact that the pitch is only approximate, no singing effect is ever aimed at, and yet the rigorous prescriptions as to rhythm and inflection give the narrator's part a firm musical (i.e. motivic and thematic) structure.

To begin with, we must observe that Schoenberg's extra-musical choice does not constitute the slightest obstacle or hindrance to the freedom of his compositional project. Not only does Schoenberg not make the slightest concession as far as the general tone and structure of his musical idiom are concerned, but, on the contrary, he uses this idiom in a most radical and novel way, so that it becomes possible to say that this new musical gesture of his culminates into one of his freest and most subversive acts.¹

All this should not be surprising. It is, indeed, quite obvious that an artist of Schoenberg's greatness cannot suddenly weaken his idiom when outer circumstances affect him. But the reason for the increased radicalism (if I may say so) of Schoenberg's idiom in this particular circumstance can be understood all the better if one keeps in mind that the *Survivor from Warsaw* is a *dramatic* work. The dramatic streak is one of the most evident and one of the strongest in Schoenberg's output. He has written three of the most powerful works of our time for the theatre, and he has used dramatic means and devices in many other works. Just as significant is his interest, which arose some twenty years ago, in the specific drama of the Jewish people. He has expressed these preoccupations in a so far unpublished play: *The Biblical Way*, and in a yet unfinished opera, *Moses and Aaron*. Of the latter he wrote the text and the first two acts in a surprisingly short time (between 1930 and 1932), but he has so far been prevented by circumstances from completing the work. No wonder then that, lately, Schoenberg has not only resorted to dramatic means quite often, but that a short and striking dramatic scene such as the subject of the *Survivor* provided an ideal opportunity for, should have become one of his boldest and most perfect undertakings in the field of musical drama.



Having observed the complete adequacy of inspiration and expression, of extra-musical and purely musical preoccupations on a more or less general level, let us now verify the similarity of this state on more and more particular levels.

One of the most obvious consequences of Schoenberg's

¹ The work is a strict twelve-tone composition wherein the twelve-tone technique is used in a highly advanced manner.

dramatic preoccupations is the creation and frequent use of this entirely new musical and dramatic medium, the 'Sprechgesang', to which we have referred above.¹

He has resorted to it over and over again, and most recently in the *Ode to Napoleon* (composed in 1942). So far, however, Schoenberg has never actually experienced the combination of both the 'Sprechgesang' and the large orchestra,² and after the *Ode* it became quite obvious that such an experience had to be gone through. Thus the composition of a dramatic work with orchestra, within which the 'Sprechgesang' would play an important part must have been one of Schoenberg's main compositional preoccupations.

The idea of a narrator telling us the story of the tragic episode of the Warsaw ghetto now appears to us in a new light. Not only does it correspond to some of Schoenberg's most constant social concerns, not only does it thus become one of the best sources of dramatic impulse and inspiration, but, above all perhaps, it fulfills a pure and specific compositional purpose; thus the total adequacy of all the elements and preoccupations involved becomes a natural consequence.

* * *

It would be easy to pursue the examination of this admirable balance of extra-musical and purely musical projects right into the subtlest details of the *Survivor*. Without wanting to go so far, let us nevertheless draw attention to a few more instances which, I hope, will prove our point.

Another very important problem of composition posed in Schoenberg's last works is the blending of highly contrasted elements. The musical discourse thus achieves complete formal freedom and tends towards what one might call an 'athematic'

¹ Its main merit resides in the fact that it can take the place of the old Recitative, without ever destroying or interrupting the general musical construction. The Recitative did not always avoid these dangers. At its best it still had to conform to completely conventional patterns. The 'Sprechgesang', however, thanks to its complete structural firmness (see footnote 2 on page 126), not only submits completely to the exigencies of the strictest musical form, but it is never tied to any particular structural handling, and can thus be used in any environment, in any setting, etc.

² The Klaus Narr sections in the *Gurrelieder* are an attempt in this respect, but the 'Sprechgesang' is not yet fully developed in this work.

style wherein no themes and no important sections are repeated. This problem is solved in a masterly fashion in the works in question. It is therefore possible to say that this solution is also due to the very subject matter and to the character of the narration, both of which present a highly 'distorted', 'ragged' and even savage dramatic aspect within which formal symmetry and repetitions would constitute real incongruities.

However this lack of formal symmetry does not in any sense exclude a musical construction of the most rigorous type. On the contrary, the wealth of musical features with which we are presented here is the result of the finest craftsmanship in the realm of developing variation, this most dignified tool of musical composition. In this respect it is interesting to observe that the art of variation is applied here to the most elementary and the most laconic motivic material, so that, by avoiding the statement of too precise figures, the freedom of the musical discourse should be achieved in a consequential and natural fashion. The trumpet motive and the martial rhythms which open the work (and which immediately create the atmosphere of military and terrifying 'discipline') are very characteristic examples of the brief and elementary basic material.

I should also like to mention the important part played by the percussion instruments (another reference to the military atmosphere) which are used here in rather unusual quantity,¹ and the grotesque, shrill shouting effects of the narrator when he imitates the voice of the 'Feldwebel'. These highly dramatic gestures determine certain important moments of suspense and create precise compositional caesurae which contribute to the formal asymmetry discussed above.

Finally, I should like to say a few words about the significance of the Hebrew prayer and the usage of the chorus. Early in the work, when the narrator first mentions the fact that the prayer was sung, a remote and vague musical phrase is heard in the orchestra. This phrase, presented by the first horn on a 'blurred' background of broken chord figures in the strings to which the harp adds a delicate bass, seems, at first, ambiguous in its function. It seems to be either the conclusive segment of what occurred

¹ At the performance which I gave of the work (over the Paris radio in December 1948) I used seven percussion players in order to achieve a maximum of clarity.

before or the transition to the following section, or even a completely 'free' phase without any specific function. Such an ambiguity (due both to the dream-like, almost unconscious, quality of the narrator and to the vague and diluted structure) is one of the most characteristic features of the contrasted, athematic style pursued by Schoenberg. And yet the full and clear significance of the passage which we have just described reveals itself in the conclusive choral section of the work.

The narrator's final words, 'They began again (counting the corpses), first slowly: one, two, three, four, became faster and faster, so fast that it finally sounded like a stampede of wild horses and, quite of a sudden, in the middle of it, they began singing the "Shema Yisroel"', which create the highest point of dramatic tension, are accompanied by a fantastically powerful orchestral *accelerando* and *crescendo* which establish the purely compositional climax. The last words of the narrator, when both drama and music achieve their highest point, are followed by a sudden outburst of the chorus which begins singing the prayer. Thus begins the last section of the work, a broad coda in the form of a figured *cantus firmus* which reminds one of the typical final *chorale*. Here we recognize the ambiguous horn phrase mentioned above, developed in all its implications and carried to its furthest limits. Such a development has been made possible through the consequent use of the *cantus firmus* technique for which the mere idea of the prayer has proved to be the most adequate opportunity.

CONCLUSION

It seems hardly worth while recapitulating the various aspects of the miraculous equilibrium between extra-musical and purely musical preoccupations which, in the *Survivor*, are responsible for the completely successful realization of one of the most difficult tasks any artist can undertake. The attentive reader, will, I think, have grasped the point which we have tried to prove and it should also be superfluous to have to repeat that only a really great work of art (that is, a work achieved through the masterful usage of purely artistic means) can, if inspired by social realities, become a valid expression of, and a real tribute to these realities.

One point, however, can never be repeated nor emphasized enough: by trying to force upon themselves or upon others an

artistic behaviour which is commanded by extra-artistic speculation, our present champions of so-called ‘progressive art’ are sponsoring a second-hand product which not only implies real contempt for those whom they pretend to serve, but which, above all, will become a harmful element within the society which they are trying to build. Their so-called commitment to social realities can only appear to us in a most dubious light, since they have failed to commit themselves totally to the exigencies of that which should be their primary *raison d’être*, a complete devotion to their work and to their deepest responsibilities in their own field. It should be obvious that every man is most useful to society and mankind in general by doing his utmost in his own field and, unless one assumes that art is a completely useless activity (which the ‘progressive’ minds pretend they do not), an artist can only be fully useful by becoming a genuine artist. For this he must have the courage to face the most radical problems of his work; in other words, he must commit himself entirely to the most advanced acquisitions (complex and terrifying as they may be) of the evolution of his art. If he is able to do this he will, through his own commitment, produce an art which will be essentially committed. If, on top of this, he will try to express some social reality which affects him, he will not produce a caricature of this reality, which will perhaps satisfy the laziness and cowardice of those who are as lazy and as cowardly as the caricature itself, but he may possibly create a great work of art within which the reality expressed will reveal its highest significance.

Thus, but only thus, can the artist contribute to the values of mankind, civilization, society, or whatever one chooses to call it, and this is, I think, what Schoenberg’s *Survivor from Warsaw* has not failed to achieve.

MARK SCHORER

THE GOOD NOVELIST IN 'THE GOOD SOLDIER'

TODAY one hears very little about Ford Maddox Ford, not long ago so prolifically present, the always present friend of all the great, the abettor of all the promising young. Yet Ford was great in his own right, and it is painful to feel that rather than isolate the solid work from the mass of books he wrote and make that stand, we should, through our inertia, let what was great sink dimly into the mass while the name continues to lose its lustre. As a beginning in an attempt to estimate the name again and to determine the particular things that Ford could do well in fiction, one might profitably re-read *The Good Soldier*.

Like most great works of comic irony, the mechanical structure of *The Good Soldier* is controlled to a degree nothing less than taut, while the structure of meaning is almost blandly open, capable of limitless refractions. One may go further, perhaps, and say that the novel renews a major lesson of all classic art: from the very delimitation of form arises the exfoliation of theme. This, at any rate, is the fact about *The Good Soldier* which gives point to John Rodker's quip that 'it is the finest French novel in the English language', which is to say that it has perfect clarity of surface and nearly mathematical poise, and—as an admirer would wish to extend the remark—a substance at once exact and richly enigmatic. As a novel, *The Good Soldier* is like a hall of mirrors, so constructed that, while one is always looking straight ahead at a perfectly solid surface, one is made to contemplate not the bright surface itself, but the bewildering maze of past circumstances and future consequence which—somewhat falsely—it contains. Or it is like some structure all of glass and brilliantly illuminated, from which one looks out upon a sable jungle and ragged darkness.

The Good Soldier carries the sub-title 'A Tale of Passion', and the book's controlling irony lies in the fact that passionate situations are related by a narrator who is himself incapable of passion, sexual and moral alike. His is the true *accidia*, and so, from his

opening absurdity, 'This is the saddest story I have ever heard', on to the end and at every point, we are forced to ask, 'How can we believe *him*? His must be exactly the *wrong* view.' The fracture between the character of the event as we feel it to be, and the character of the narrator as he reports the event to us, is the essential irony, yet it is not in any way a simple one; for the narrator's view, as we soon discover, is not so much the wrong view as merely *a* view, although a special one. No simple inversion of statement can yield up the truth, for the truth is the maze, and, as we learn from what is perhaps the major theme of the book, appearances have their reality.

First of all, this novel is about the difference between convention and fact. The story consists of the narrator's attempt to adjust his reason to the shattering discovery that, in his most intimate relationships, he has, for nine years, mistaken the conventions of social behaviour for the actual human fact. That he did not want it otherwise, that the deception was in effect self-induced, that he could not have lived at all with the actuality is, for the moment, beside our point, although ultimately, for the attitude and the architecture of the novel, it is the whole point.

The narrator and his wife, Florence, are wealthy Americans; the friends with whom they are intimately concerned, Edward and Leonora Ashburnham, are wealthy English people. Together, these four seem to be the very bloom of international society; they are all, as the narrator repeatedly tells us, 'good people', and the Ashburnhams are even that special kind of good people, 'good county people'. Florence is a little pathetic, because she suffers from heart trouble and must be protected against every shock and exposure. Leonora is perhaps a little strong-willed in the management of her domestic affairs, but these have been very trying and in their cause she has been altogether splendid and self-sacrificing, a noblewoman. Edward is nearly flawless: 'the fine soldier, the excellent landlord, the extraordinarily kind, careful and industrious magistrate, the upright, honest, fair-dealing, fair-thinking, public character . . . the model of humanity, the hero, the athlete, the father of his country, the law-giver'. For nine years these four have enjoyed an apparently placid and civilized friendship, visiting back and forth, meeting annually at Nauheim where they take the seasonal, hypochondriac baths, sharing in one another's interests and affairs. Then Florence is

revealed to be a stupid little harlot, whose illness has been an invention to hold and deceive a husband, and she commits suicide. Edward is revealed to be a sentimental libertine, for years Florence's lover, and he commits suicide. Leonora is revealed to have the maniacal will of a tigress, the egotistic composure of a serpent, and she promptly remarries. The narrator, charged at the end with the responsibility of caring for a mad girl, Edward's last love, is left attempting to relate his new knowledge of this exposed reality to his long, untroubled faith in its appearance.

But are not these 'realities', in effect, 'appearances'? Are not the 'facts', which the narrator discovers, in themselves 'conventions' of a sort? We are forced, at every point, to look back at this narrator, to scan his beguiling surprise, to measure the angle of refraction at which that veiled glance penetrates experience. He himself suggests that we are looking at events here as one looks at the image of a mirror in a mirror, at the box within the box within the box, the arch beyond the arch beyond the arch. All on one page we find these reversals: 'Upon my word, yes, our intimacy was like a minuet. . . . No, by God, it is false! It wasn't a minuet that we stepped; it was a prison—a prison full of screaming hysterics. . . . And yet I swear by the sacred name of my creator that it was true. It was true sunshine; the true music; the true splash of the fountains from the mouths of stone dolphins. For, if for me we were four people with the same tastes, with the same desires, acting—or, no, not acting—sitting here and there unanimously, isn't that the truth?' The appearance had its reality. How, then, does the 'reality' suggest that it is something less—or more?

Why is Florence always 'poor Florence' or 'that poor wretch' or 'that poor cuckoo'? Why the persistent denigration of tone? Why can Florence not be charged with something less trivial and vulgar than 'making eyes at Edward'? The narrator has something to gain in Florence's loss, and that is a fragment of self-esteem. If Florence is a harlot, she is so, in part, because of her husband's fantastic failure, but if we can be persuaded of her calculated vice and of her nearly monstrous malice, her husband appears before us as the pathetic victim of life's ironic circumstance. What, again, is the meaning of the narrator's nearly phobic concern with Catholicism, or of the way in which his slurs at Leonora are justified by her attachment to that persuasion?

This is a mind not quite in balance. And again, Leonora's loss is Edward's gain, and Edward's gain at last is the narrator's gain. For why are Florence's indiscretions crimes, and Edward's, with Florence, follies at worst, and, at best, true goodnesses of heart? Why, after his degradation, is Edward still 'a fine fellow'? In every case the 'fact' is somewhere between the mere social convention and that different order of convention which the distorted understanding of the narrator imposes upon them.

Yet the good novelist does not let us rest here. These distortions are further revelations. Mirror illuminates mirror, each arch marks farther distances. Ford tells us that he suggested the title *The Good Soldier* 'in hasty irony' when the publisher's objections to *The Saddest Story* became imperative; and while, under the circumstances of 1915, it must have seemed, for this novel, peculiarly inappropriate, certainly uncongenial enough to cause the author understandable 'horror', it is nevertheless very useful to readers today, so accustomed to war that the word 'soldier' no longer carries its special force. The novel designates Edward as the good soldier, since Edward has seen imperial service in India. For Edward the narrator has the strongest affection and his only forgiveness. Of him, he says: 'I guess that I myself, in my fainter way, come into the category of the passionate, of the headstrong, and the too-truthful. (This is his weirdest absurdity, the final, total blindness of infatuation, and self-infatuation.) For I can't conceal from myself the fact that I loved Edward Ashburnham—and that I love him because he was just myself. If I had had the courage and the virility and possibly also the physique of Edward Ashburnham I should, I fancy, have done much what he did. He seems to me like a large elder brother who took me out on several excursions and did many dashing things whilst I just watched him robbing orchards, from a distance. And, you see, I am just as much of a sentimentalist as he was. . . . ' Niggardly, niggardly half-truth! The narrator aspires to be 'the good soldier', the conventionally fine fellow, yet has no expectation of ever being in the least like him in any but his most passive features, and these working not at the level of sexuality, as with Edward, but of malformed friendship. To understand the exact significance here, we must turn, perhaps, to another book.

In his dedicatory epistle in the 1927 edition, Ford says that he hoped *The Good Soldier* would do in English something of the sort

that De Maupassant's *Fort Comme la Mort* did in French. The remark is suggestive in the structural terms that Ford must have had in mind; I wish, however, to call attention to what may be the most accidental connexion of theme. Of one of his characters, De Maupassant says, 'He was an old intellectual who might have been, perhaps, a good soldier, and could never console himself for what he had not been.'

The vicious consolations of failure form our narrator. 'Men,' said D. H. Lawrence, 'men can suck the heady juice of exalted self-importance from the bitter weed of failure—failures are usually the most conceited of men.' Thus, at the end of the novel, we have forgotten the named good soldier, and we look instead at the nominated one, the narrator himself. His consolations are small—attendance upon the ill, 'seeing them through'—for twelve years his wife, for the rest of his life the mad girl whom he fancies he might have loved; yet they give him a function, at least. This is the bitter, paltry destiny which, he thinks, life has forced upon him; thus he need never see himself as bitter or as paltry—or, indeed, as even telling a story.

And thus we come to the final circles of meaning, and these, like ripples round a stone, never stop. For finally, *The Good Soldier* describes a world which is without moral point, a narrator who suffers from the madness of moral inertia. 'You ask how it feels to be a deceived husband. Just Heavens, I do not know. It feels just nothing at all. It is not Hell, certainly it is not necessarily Heaven. So I suppose it is the intermediate stage. What do they call it? Limbo.' *Accidia!* It is the dull hysteria of sloth which besets him, the sluggish insanity of defective love. 'And, yes, from that day forward she always treated me and not Florence as if I were the invalid.' 'Why, even to me she had the air of being submissive—to me that not the youngest child will ever pay heed to. Yes, this is the saddest story. . . . ' The saddest story? One may say this another way, and say the same thing. *The Good Soldier* is a comedy of humour, and the humour is phlegm.

It is in the comedy that Ford displays his great art. Irony, which makes no absolute commitments and can thus enjoy the advantage of many ambiguities of meaning and endless complexities of situation, is at the same time an evaluative mood, and, in a master, a sharp one. Perhaps the most astonishing achievement in this astonishing novel is the manner in which the author, while

speaking through his simple, infatuated character, lets us know how to take his simplicity and his infatuation. This is comic genius. It shows, for example, in the characteristic figures, the rather simple-minded and, at the same time, grotesquely comic metaphors: a girl in a white dress in the dark is 'like a phosphorescent fish in a cupboard'; Leonora glances at the narrator, and he feels 'as if for a moment a lighthouse had looked at me'; Leonora, boxing the ears of one of Edward's little mistresses, 'was just striking the face of an intolerable universe'. Figures such as these, and they occur in abundance, are the main ingredient in Ford's tone, and they are the subtle supports of such broader statements as this: 'I should marry Nancy if her reason were ever sufficiently restored to let her appreciate the meaning of the Anglican marriage service. But it is probable that her reason will never be sufficiently restored to let her appreciate the meaning of the Anglican marriage service. Therefore I cannot marry her, according to the law of the land.' This is a mode of comic revelation and evaluation less difficult, perhaps, than that which is evident in Ford's figures of speech, but to sustain it as he does, with never a rupture of intent, is the highest art.

Then there are the wonderfully comic events—little Mrs. Maidan dead in a trunk with her feet sticking out, as though a crocodile had caught her in its giant jaws, or the poor little mad girl, saying to the narrator after weeks of silence, 'Shuttlecocks!' There are the frequent moments when the author leads his characters to the most absurd anti-climaxes (as when, at the end of the fourth chapter, Leonora, in a frenzy of self-important drama, demands, 'Don't you know that I'm an Irish Catholic?'), and then, with superb composure, Ford leads his *work* away from the pit of bathos into which his people have fallen. There is the incessant wit, of style and statement, the wittier for its deceptive clothing of pathos. And most important in this catalogue of comic devices, there is the covering symbolism of illness: characters who fancy that they suffer from 'hearts', who do suffer defective hearts, not, as they would have us believe, in the physiological but in the moral sense, and who are told about by a character who has no heart at all, and hence no mind. 'I never,' he tells us with his habitually comic solemnity, 'I never was a patient anywhere.'

Is *The Good Soldier*, perhaps, a novelist's novel? Ford thought that it was his best work, and his judgement was always the

judgement of the craftsman. Certainly it can tell us more about the nature of the novel than most novels or books about them: the material under perfect control, the control resulting in the maximum meaning, the style precisely evaluating that meaning. But if it is a kind of archetype of the processes of fiction, if, that is to say, it can demonstrate his craft to the craftsman, then it can also help all of us to read. And is it not true that, once we learn how to read, even if then we do not live more wisely, we can at least begin to be aware of why we have not? *The Good Soldier*, like all great works, has the gift and power of remorse.

SELECTED NOTICE

Olivia. By Olivia. Hogarth Press. 8s. 6d.

Olivia is that rarity, a book about love between women. Added to this it is a personal confession that in style as well as content throws light upon emotional aspects of Puritanism, particularly that variety which informed the great Evangelical families of the nineteenth century. If we wish to mourn or celebrate the eclipse of Liberalism we cannot do better than to read *Olivia* with an eye on Keynes's *Two Memoirs*. Appearing as they did within a week or two of one another, certain affinities between them were particularly striking; they are clearly products of the same intellectual tradition. In that setting *Olivia* acquires a nostalgia that she (for writer and subject are the same) may not have included in her anticipation of its appeal. If we who are too young to have known it are not homesick for the intellectual climate of the early years of this century it is because we have learnt not to waste spirit on the unattainable; a book such as *Olivia* makes us long for what seems now a lost luxury—that eclectic attitude to the truth, in itself so Puritan, that flourished then in a small way.

For myself it is impossible to regard *Olivia* quite as an ordinary book; it is a phenomenon, a meteor fallen from a world that seemed extinct, illuminating with its brief light more than the unmapped country of feminine psychology.

'Love', she writes in a passage that contains the germ of the book, 'has always been the chief business of my life, the only thing that I have thought—or felt—supremely worth while, and I don't pretend this experience was not succeeded by others . . .'

'How should I have known, indeed, what was the matter with me? There was no instruction anywhere . . . What could these grown-up men and women with their mutual love affairs have in common with a little girl like me? My case was so different, so unheard of.' She goes on to say, 'I had an uneasy feeling that, if not a joke, it was something to be ashamed of, something to hide desperately. This, I suppose, was not so much a matter of reflection . . . as of deep-rooted instinct, which all my life has kept me from any form of unveiling, which has forbidden me many of the purest physical pleasures and all literary

expression. How can one bathe without undressing, or write without laying bare one's soul?

So truthful and simple a style invites the same discriminating response from the reader and makes one want to write about it with something of its own contemplative fidelity. How difficult it is to do so, writing in our uneasy, face-formulating age! All the Puritanism in oneself reacts to her chastening example of how rewarding it is to avoid the covering formula, the epigrammatic phrase.

Later, she amplifies her central theme which is not simply a description of a love affair but an attempt to examine all the influences that contributed in her case to this experience.

'I am trying to explain,' she says, 'that though my home was very rich in intellectual influences of many sorts, there was in it a curious, an almost anomalous lack—an insufficient sense, that is, of humanity and art. With all her love of literature and painting, with all her vivid intelligence, my mother, I think, never felt otherwise than with her mind. She was perhaps incapable of mystical illumination. To speak on a lower plane, she surrounded herself with ugly objects; her furniture, her pictures, her clothes were chosen not without care but without taste; she was incapable of discriminating food or wine.'

With this background Olivia goes to her school in France. Here she finds all that she had missed without knowing it. The expansion of her senses begins; the moment comes for her experiences, sensuous and intellectual, to corruscate round one person, the origin of all these new delights. She is Mlle Julie, one of the Principals, a woman of extraordinary talents. Now comes the pivotal point upon which the balance of the story turns—the moment when Olivia first feels the fullness of love. It is while Mlle Julie is reading.

'I have always wondered what share Racine had in lighting the flame that began to burn in my heart that night, or what share proximity.'

The interactions of sexual and intellectual passion are deeply complicated for all ages and it is in this analysis of her emotions as a child, with a sense of that child standing up changed and yet unchanging inside the woman, that Olivia's method is fully justified. While Olivia, then, was transported by the poetry and Mlle Julie's interpretation—that part of her pleasure was at least sensuous and her passionate response poetic—she perceived something else: she saw that Mlle Julie was beautiful.

At this moment Olivia embraced the totality of love. There is the terror of first love, there lies the germ of that hopelessness which she describes later: for her Mlle Julie embodied every emotion that she had ever felt, must contain everything, be everything for the engulfing egocentricity of youth. She ceased, in fact, to be a real person, an attainable object to be loved, and most of what follows has to do with Olivia's attempts to reinstate her, anguished as she was by her own awakened sexual needs and by Julie's ambivalent response, perplexed above all by the relations of the women about her, of Julie and Cara, Julie and the young Signora; a world, one feels, that was all the more terrifying for not being quite grown-up, not reassuringly different enough from her own internal situation.

The value of this kind of personal confession is that you believe every word of it. Its limitation is that though you believe what you read your response is

not quite of the spontaneous or contributory kind that it would be to imaginative literature.

'How can one write without laying bare one's soul?' she asks at the beginning. But the communication as opposed to the plain statement of your deepest feelings does not depend upon a conscious laying bare but upon a talent for trusting your associative faculties to the limit. She sees the girl Olivia in the pool of her own mind. But for us the pool does not reflect. The water is perhaps too limpid, as clear as the texture of her own writing. The light of her truthfulness shines through; but light and clear water are often death to reflection. There is nothing of the narcissism that one might expect from the title, of the kind found in the texture of Debussy and in every line that Virginia Woolf wrote. I am not saying that this is a fault—obviously it is a question of taste—but trying to trace a subtle lack of depth, partly inherent in the form Olivia has chosen, partly the result of the limitations of her upbringing. The fact remains that Olivia is not whole-hearted in describing herself and her emotions in the sense that Jean-Jacques Rousseau was. She is more interested in Mlle Julie. Yet the latter, seen as she is through the eyes of memory, is a little shadowy and as many questions are left unanswered for us as they were for the child Olivia. Part of the charm and part of the defect of *Olivia* is that it has the air of being written for friends if not simply to satisfy herself. As I read I wished I had known Olivia and could have filled in some of the details for myself. (For instance, there is nothing in the book to place the event within thirty years.) Perhaps she would have read her story aloud as Mlle Julie read *Racine* or as Keynes read his *Memoirs*, in which, by the way, there is more sexuality—and this is a curious point which would take too long to elaborate—than in the whole of *Olivia*.

That was what I felt as I closed the book. For, if it did not make me feel deeply, it made me think with a special tender solicitude of the position of women, not so much in society as with regard to themselves. I should like to have asked the grown-up Olivia: What is the solution for Mlle Julie and Mlle Cara, who loved and hated one another to the point of sterility and suicide? Like Olivia, one was more concerned in the end with Julie's fate than with the child's. If girls *must* be segregated, separated from their parents, there is much to be said for such a school. In almost every respect Julie was a good mother-figure. At least they were given feminine ideals to grow up on; I would rather my daughter had her shoulder kissed by a beautiful and intelligent woman at a fancy-dress ball than that she should undergo deeper and more twisted perversions upon the playing-fields of England. On the other hand, I should dislike her to see women unhappy or ill at ease together. And on the whole women in isolation tend to have either tragic, unsatisfied or at least *gauche* and limited relations. Is the truth that women are too honest and too sensitive to believe, as men seem to, that they are self-sufficient? Where women fail is over the exclusion of the male. When they have to organize themselves in communities they uneasily feel that copies of institutions based, as are the masculine originals, upon the exclusion of the opposite sex, are unsatisfactory; that homosexuality itself is unsatisfactory, founded as it must be upon a hostile early attitude. The real trouble between Mlle Julie and Mlle Cara was that they had no settled idea between them of something to be cherished in man. Of course there will be shades of homosexuality in love between women as there

are in every other kind of love, and this is specially true for those in which intellect plays a certain phallic role. In the past there has been every reason, above all an economic one, for women to feel subordinate to men. Now that society is changing and our man-made culture, based for centuries on an intellectual-homosexual ideal, is losing ground, how much more necessary for women to get to know themselves and one another better on a basis of their real and deepest needs. But their success in love and in taking their place confidently in an equalitarian society will depend upon their attitude to the opposite sex. Let women base their relations upon a tender and passionate respect for man and they may love one another freely and fully, and with all the protection and support that women need from one another.

Perhaps Olivia will not be unhappy to think of her book as the centre of ever-widening circles of speculation upon a subject so little charted as the behaviour of women to one another. Certainly such a book needed to be written.

JEAN HOWARD

CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editor
HORIZON

1 July 1949

Sir,

I can well understand Dr. Adler's eagerness to enter the lists in the *Freud-Jung* controversy and indeed look forward with equal eagerness to his rejoinder. But I do not feel that any advantage would be gained by his making a considered reply to a case which he has not yet had the opportunity of reading *in extenso*. Moreover, I feel certain that when the sections of my essay dealing with Jung's theory of dreams, neuroses and with his character-types are published (and I am assured by Messrs. Allen & Unwin that the book will be produced with all possible speed), Dr. Adler will have no cause to regret having had to reserve his fire. I am equally sure that in the meantime no convinced Jungian will be led to renounce his allegiances by anything that has already been published.

Yours faithfully,

London, W.1

EDWARD GLOVER

The Editor,
HORIZON

21 June 1949

Sir,

The article 'The Waldorf Conference', by Dwight MacDonald, published in your issue of May 1949, contains a number of factual errors. Your readers would no doubt be grateful to have them corrected, since certain of Mr. MacDonald's conclusions are based on them.

(i) p. 318 *et passim*. The incorrect transliteration of the names Akhmatova,

Fadeyev and Zoshchenko as 'Akhmetova', 'Fadayev' and 'Zostchenko' betrays a certain lack of first-hand knowledge of these authors, as does the confusion between *Ivan Katayev*, mentioned by Mr. MacDonald as an 'internationally known writer', and *Valentin Katayev*, who is the author of the works quoted as by 'Katayev' in the footnote on p. 319.

(ii) p. 319. On the basis of a list of English translations in the N.Y. Public Library, Mr. MacDonald disputes Mr. Fadeyev's remark that the six Soviet writers mentioned by Mr. MacDonald are 'not available in translation in America'. Of the sixteen translations listed, six were published from 1922 to 1929, six from 1931 to 1939; of the four published from 1942 to 1946, two are wartime productions by Valentin Katayev and two are collections of poems by Pasternak written before the war. Taking into account the normal delay between publication in the original and in translation, this list does not argue a high degree of availability of current or even recent works by the authors in question.

(iii) p. 320 (footnote). Mr. MacDonald argues that the publication of work by Zoshchenko in 1947 'proves nothing', since 'Zostchenko was purged by Zhdanov in August 1947'. The controversy in the Union of Soviet Writers over Zoshchenko's work took place in August 1946.

(iv) pp. 317 and 318. Mr. MacDonald refers somewhat imprecisely to Mr. Fadeyev as 'an official of no literary standing' and to Mr. Pavlenko as 'a nonentity (who) looked the part'. His unfamiliarity with contemporary Soviet literature, together with the fact that their two most recent major works (*The Young Guard*, by Fadeyev, and *Happiness*, by Pavlenko) are 'not available in translation' may perhaps be Mr. MacDonald's excuse for not knowing that Fadeyev's work has been appearing in the U.S.S.R. since 1927, and Pavlenko's since 1928.

Incidentally, on p. 317, Mr. MacDonald poses, but does not answer, an interesting question: 'Pavlenko was a nonentity and looked the part'; 'Fadeyev . . . looked more like a plain-clothes detective than a writer'. What is the physiognometric norm for writers?

Yours faithfully,

ELEANOR FOX

The Editor,
THE HORIZON,
London.

LONDON, 22.4.1949.

Dear Sir,

In the March issue of your periodical we read an article under the heading 'Where shall John go'—Cyprus, that a certain Mr. N. K. Branch had the kindness to contribute.

It was not our intention to deal with the distorted facts in the text before a number of friends in England and America urged us to give out to your periodical some hints about the real situation in the island of Cyprus, that your said contributor so deliberately closed his eyes to.

It should be said at the very outset that that article may serve any purpose other than the promotion of friendly feelings between the noble Greeks of the island and the British people.

To begin with, this short letter is not expected to give an account of the historical background of the island of Cyprus. We should have said, however, that the island of Cyprus is not expecting just anybody to know its history, ethnology, laography and in general its culture that its inhabitants, Greek from time immemorial, so proudly preserve.

For the sake of fairness to the readers of the HORIZON, we shall answer the different grotesque misstatements, found in the said article from the beginning to its end, one by one.

First, about the life in Cyprus. The greatest impediment in understanding life in the case of your contributor must have been the difference of language. A Spaniard who does not speak English can never understand the English way of life. This being so, he should be very reluctant in expressing his impressions about Cyprus. The result of his having so recklessly done the reverse is most unlikely to have any convincing power. We are, however, to inform him that this language of the 9/10 of the inhabitants, who, as said above are Greeks from time immemorial, is still in many respects the language which is known all over the civilized world as that of Homer and all the graduates of English Universities understand it wherever they find it spoken. Hospitality is on the other hand, something that your correspondent in question does not understand much about, otherwise he would be able to appreciate it too much in our country. With a little bit of Greek history at the background of his education the said eminent writer of your periodical could easily find the same kind of hospitality spread in the life of the Greeks from the time of their far ancestors three thousand years ago up to now. How far that traditional hospitality corresponds to the tourist feelings of the said contributor is a matter of political speculation intended to be made by him in writing his above insulting and ungrateful article.

Admitting that the Greeks of the island constitute the overwhelming majority of the inhabitants, he proceeds to say that there are 'other minorities', of Turks, Armenians, and a syndicate of Jews! This means that he takes the Greeks as a minority, without noticing that by so doing he contradicts himself in a deplorable way. As to the Turks, whom he finds courteous, with a melancholy charm and of a character which is more easily understood by the Western European, it is a little bit amazing that he does not make use of somewhat superlative expressions to praise their virtues in defiance of the Greeks of Cyprus, on whose culture the Western civilization that all of us today are so proud of is fundamentally based! Undoubtedly, his endeavour is to flatter the small minority of the Turks, the remnants of the Turkish occupation of the island, who are the eternal 'yesmen' of the British occupation of the island, in the pious hope that such a policy may ease the rule over the nationalistic majority. He apparently forgets that this is a bankrupt technique that so workable and flourishing though in the past produces today the most unprecedented uncertainty and strongest antipathy.

He talks of the terms of life for a tourist of Cyprus as of a most undesirable thing for the holidaymakers! It seems that his experience as a tourist abroad has been confined to Cyprus only, otherwise, he would be able to draw some distinctions, as he should, between Cyprus and other places with tourist industry. When he passes his bitter and unfair remarks on Cyprus as a touristic

centre, he surely ignores, beside the rest of the things he proves himself completely unaware of, that a substantial portion of the accumulated heavy taxes, collected from the island on the strength of the legislation passed by a single man, the British Governor (what a shame, indeed!), is yearly going by thousands to the tourist propaganda abroad, for which the dictators of the British administration of the island, at least show to be interested. Is that wonderful article purported to help that propaganda or to jeopardize its results? Definitely, the second happens, for reasons known only to him and his associates while on the island.

When he writes in such a pompous way that there is on the island a village of negroes, does he realize that there are in Cyprus as many negroes as tigers in the British isles? Where on earth did he get such an admirably reliable information from, nobody knows. It is, however, true to say that even the most mythic informations like this have very easily found his biased mind ready to adopt them and depict them in the poisonous article under review here.

The contrast of the monastery of the Greek Orthodox church where he has been offered such a courteous hospitality, God knows for how long, for nothing, with the night clubs of the island is a sufficient ground for disbelieving his writing that the life in the latter is practically stealing. The same applies to the prices and quality of the locally produced intoxicating liquors, which are so well known to the people in England. Of course, prices are high in such places all over the world, including this country, but only those people seem to know it who care to get to know these details.

Much more can be written to prove that your said correspondent was amply armed with the most hideous bias against the Greeks of Cyprus and of the island herself for his own obvious reasons while writing the article referred to here. Unlike him, however, we prefer to stop at this point for sparing your periodical's precious space. What could only be said in conclusion is that such monastery visitors who, though drinking the hospitality they are religiously offered by our people to the bottom of the glass stab their hosts and their country in the back as soon as they come out of Cyprus, are not at all desired. We should be careful in the future to see that the visitors of the island are people of good faith and ready to appreciate hospitality instead of highbrow colonials who are grown up and bred with the critical mind of the most undetachable superiority complex that makes them like leopards.

Due to the fact that quite recently the dictatorial regime in Cyprus passed a law forbidding the truth from becoming known to the outside world through publications, and automatically, without trial, confiscating the property of the persons involved on the top of their not being allowed to return home, we regret that we are unable to sign the present letter to you. This is what your correspondent is hiding behind. Bravo! Greek Cypriots.



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